


TRANSLATED WITH A PREFACE BY  
THOMAS HITOSHI PRUIKSMA

# THE KURAL

TIRUVALLUVAR'S TIRUKKURAL



A NEW TRANSLATION OF  
THE CLASSICAL TAMIL MASTERPIECE  
ON ETHICS, POWER,  
AND LOVE

FOREWORD BY **ANDREW HARVEY**

INTRODUCTION BY **ARCHANA VENKATESAN**

# THE KURAL

*Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural*



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THOMAS HITOSHI PRUIKSMA

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*For the late Dr. K. V. Ramakoti,  
beloved teacher,  
mentor, and friend*

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## FOREWORD

Anyone who is, even unwillingly, half awake knows with increasing dread and anguish that the whole world now is plunged into an unprecedented many-layered crisis that threatens the whole human adventure. The coronavirus rages, the Amazon burns, the polar ice melts, a million species totter on the brink of extinction, the chasm between rich and poor is expanding, and billionaires flourish while middle-class and blue-collar workers line up for food; democracy all over the world is threatened by authoritarianism and the spread of outrageous conspiracy theories, what Barack Obama refers to, too politely, as “global truth decay” but which should really be named “truth genocide.”

An old priest I love in Chidambaram, the greatest of all Shivite temples in Tamil Nadu, said to me last year, “We are now at a late stage of Kali Yuga, the age when the Dark One dances and all things are potentially destroyed. The human race will either die out, and soon, or transform completely under the pressure of extreme tragedy and birth a new kind of human being in harmony with God and so able to co-create a new world.”

Three years before I had been in Australia, attending the Dalai Lama’s teachings on the tantra of transfiguration in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition. For days his holiness poured out precise transcendent wisdom in a stark cement room draped with Tibetan tangkas. In a corridor after the last session, I had the opportunity to ask him a question.

“Do you think humanity will survive?”

He paused and said quietly, “I do not know. No one knows.” Then, he smiled. “Prepare for the worst, and work tirelessly for the best.”

Those who work tirelessly for the best—the birth of a new kind of human being and a new world rising like a phoenix out of the smoldering ashes of the old—know one thing. They know that our greatest hope, encouragement, and inspiration will come not from our contemporary, absurdly narcissistic “New Age” spirituality, nor from the religions in their state of decay, nor from science or from economics nor political change, but from the treasure houses of spiritual wisdom that mature ancient civilizations offer us. The enlightened testimony of the great sages—from Lao-Tzu to Buddha to Jesus and Rumi and Kabir, and in our time, Anandamayi Ma, Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo—offers us the

peace and rigor of timeless truth as the foundation of the one life worth living at any time, but especially in this one. And that is a life surrendered to the Divine, loving and serving its laws of compassion to, and justice for, all, whatever the hell or heaven happens. This birthing force of a new humanity is what I have called “sacred activism,” an activism grounded in, inspired, and guided by divine consciousness. In the last century, we have seen what “impossible” transformations can be initiated by human beings such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Jane Goodall, and the Dalai Lama, who enshrine and enact this truth.

This is where the majestic masterpiece of South Indian civilization, the Kural, written centuries ago, comes in. Its author, Tiruvalluvar, is not only one of India’s but one of the world’s greatest poets, a master of the couplet aphorism, the most naked and exigent of forms. He is a sage of sacred life, and his vision of a world flooded with divine presence and governed by divine laws, whose observance engenders joy, balance, and harmony for all beings, could not be more relevant or inspiring for us, or more essential, not only to admire, but to learn from.

I was born in 1952 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, and spent the first nine years of my childhood there and in Delhi. For three years of my childhood, from six to nine, I was educated in its Nilgiri Hills, where my parents now lie buried.

In the forty years since, Tamil Nadu has been the secret center of my mystical unfolding. Since the moment I first encountered the Kural—in a visit to Tamil Nadu at age twenty-eight, in the sometimes garbled translations by G. U. Pope—I have revered and read and reread it. Astonished afresh at each rereading, I found my own inner experience expanded and revealed to me not only as a sublime crystallization of the wisdom of ancient Indian civilization but also, miraculously, as an ever-fresh guide to any serious efforts to birth, out of the apocalyptic chaos of our Kali ordeal, a new world. Long revered among the Tamils as a book to live and die by, the Kural deserves now to be read by seekers everywhere and by all those who know that, in André Malraux’s words, “the twenty-first century will either be founded on a mystical foundation, or not at all.”

The Kural offers us nothing less than a balanced and precise vision of how to live, love, work, and flourish in an already sacred world, a world known and recognized to be entirely sacred in all of its realms, both transcendent and immanent. It invites us calmly and with both ruthless and exalted authority to celebrate this sacred reality and respect its laws in every activity and domain of our lives, or risk our destruction, and the destruction of the creation it is our responsibility to protect. The Kural could only have been written by an enlightened being. In the astonishingly fresh and vibrant translations that adorn this book, Tiruvalluvar’s voice can now reach the universal audience that so deeply needs its universal wisdom.

In honor of these translations and this wisdom, I have chosen eleven of the Kural's aphorisms in an unfolding order, with commentary. May this order and my commentary inspire you in your own exploration of and meditation on Tiruvalluvar's message, and grace you the sober joy and resolution it continues to grace me.

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Hold to the hold of one who holds nothing—to hold  
nothing  
Hold to that hold

All the great mystical traditions know that the ultimate reality that creates and permeates everything can only be, inadequately, expressed as “nothing”—the “Ayin” of the kabbalists, the “Nirguna Brahman” of Hinduism, the “Sunya” or “Void” of Buddhism, Islam’s “Allah” (one of whose meanings is the No-Thing), the “Tao” of Taoists, the “Godhead” of the Christian mystics, from Meister Eckhart to Saint John of the Cross, Kabir’s “Unshadowed God.”

It is in holding to the One that is this “Nothing”—or to one who, initiated into the final mystery of this One, holds to “Nothing”—that we gradually unlearn everything, both the concepts of the ego and the dogmas, however illumined, of religion. Then we can live in that “unknowing knowing” that, over time, liberates and transfigures us (as Kabir would say “engoldens” us) in eternal life.

This, as Tiruvalluvar knows, is the secret of secrets, the secret that has revolutionized forever the lives of all humanity’s greatest evolutionary pioneers, from the Jewish prophets to Jesus and Mohammed, from Lao-Tzu to Aurobindo and the Dalai Lama, and countless other seekers through the ages who have discovered its all-transforming alchemy.

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Those who let go embody grace—they show  
Compassion to all

Those who “let go”—surrender wholly to the mystery by “holding to the one who holds nothing”—are transfigured by grace in mind, heart, and body. The sign that this alchemy of “engoldenment” is real in you is that “you show compassion to all,” to the evil as well as the good, and not only to human beings but also, as Tiruvalluvar makes clear throughout the Kural, to animals and all other sentient beings. This compassion is not what Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche called “idiot compassion.” It is united with discerning wisdom that sees and knows all things and beings in their complex interrelation, and that faces the devastation that dark choices

The wicked are like gods—they too  
Do as they please

This devastating couplet enshrines the profound discerning wisdom that divine compassion is one with. It demonstrates with ironic precision why evil is seductive: abolishing or flouting conscience offers a pseudo-godlike freedom of action and possibility, while “holding to the one who holds nothing” demands stringent discipline and clinging to truth. Tiruvalluvar here reveals, in a few brief words, why so many in our time, unmoored from sacred revelation, have chosen the path of dark power, with the apocalyptic consequences we see now threatening the human race with extinction. This famous couplet is at once a warning to those who love God to struggle to make this shadow conscious so they can “embody grace” and a subtle warning to the wicked who, while they may imagine they are “free,” are only “like” gods, doomed to be destroyed through karmic payback for their actions.

The wicked are luckier than the good—nothing  
Troubles their hearts

Those who choose what Kabir calls “the hard, winding, thorny road” to embodying grace will be subjected to many fierce ordeals as the price of being born into a new reality. Those who choose the dark will seem to be luckier; their stone hearts will not be ravaged by the multiple heartbreaks that break again and again the hearts of the good. This “luck” is illusory. To not be “troubled” by ordeal or by the agony of the world bars the wicked from transformation and so ensures their continual rebirth in illusion.

Everything belongs to the loveless—for the loving  
Bones too belong to others

The price to enter the stream of embodying grace is the act of dying to the nature of the false self that, in its lethal narcissism, is loveless, addicted to the fantasy that everything exists for its use and pleasure. It is this fantasy of the loveless that we can now clearly see ruining the planet in an orgy of greed. Those who divine love transfigures, however, lose all illusions of separation: divine wisdom and divine compassion unite in them to make them what the great Christian mystic Hadewijch of Antwerp

called “slaves of love.” They know they are “others” and “others” are them: their lives are consumed willingly in the fire of relentless service to all beings.

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Humility and sweet speech adorn one in beauty—  
All else does not

Those who embody grace radiate humility, the humility of true knowledge, and speak their truth with a tender precision and respect that has the best hope of winning and transforming hearts. The beauty that adorns them is the mysterious beauty of God who “is beauty and loves the beautiful,” as the Koran proclaims. The true aim of human life, Tiruvalluvar says, is not wealth or power or success but to become “beautiful,” to be transfigured by love into its humble and radiant servant.

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Even stung by arrows the elephant stands tall—even stung  
By failure the sturdy do not slacken

It would be a mistake to imagine that Tiruvalluvar’s ideal is a passive one. The beauty that the previous couplet celebrates is founded in adamant strength. As my great teacher, Father Bede Griffiths, once said to me, “The divine human being is, at once, tender as a flower and hard as a diamond.”

In its deepest sense, the Kural is a training in nobility of the soul. Only those forged in the soul’s noble furnace will be able to continue telling truth to power and standing up for justice and compassion. Rugged hope is implied in Tiruvalluvar’s words. If the sturdy and noble do not slacken when assaulted and defeated again and again, not only will they themselves embody grace but grace itself, in its own timing, may realize their selfless dreams for humanity.

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The great do the impossible—the small do  
What everyone can

Those who die nobly in life into eternal truth are capable, through the mystery of grace, of doing what seems impossible, of being nothing less than living channels of miraculous grace. All authentic mystical traditions know and celebrate this revelation, and ignorance of its reality is one reason contemporary humanity suffers so deeply from meaninglessness, apathy, and despair.

In our time, when so many living beings are clearly threatened with



extinction, true lovers of God must strive for this greatness, the greatness of the beautiful and sturdy who embody grace. Without its empowerment, collaboration with the evolutionary will of the Divine to birth a new humanity out of the death of the old is impossible; with it, there are no human limits to what the divine can accomplish through the human being surrendered to its love.

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Bring these five out of darkness and act—  
Tools time place means deed

The beautiful and sturdy who become living channels of miraculous grace do impossible things: their actions radiate divine blessing and divine power.

In a time as dire as ours, it is only this vision of sacredly inspired and embodied truth in action that can possibly save us. Those who know this, who “bring these five out of darkness” and know their “bones too belong to others,” and continue to act for compassion and justice, are transfigured themselves and pioneer the birth of a transfigured humanity and world.

In its few words, this couplet sums up this birthing force of sacred action. We need the appropriate tools to become empowered and the patience and wisdom to know when they can be employed, as well as the place to use them. Skillful means are required of us; we must be attuned to the situation. The deed itself is the precise divinely guided and ordained action that can realize the tools’ combined power. To those who surrender wholly to the will of God and embody grace, the interfusion of “tools time place means deed” becomes effortless. It makes seemingly impossible individual and structural changes in our world possible.

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Undying deeds happen as hoped if one severs  
Desire completely

The condition for becoming an instrument of transformative sacred action and a humble transfigured pioneer of a new humanity and world is the surrender of the fruits of action to the divine. All authentic mystical systems proclaim this truth, and realizing it demands the ultimate ascesis of sacrificial patience and surrender. The reward of this ascesis is that “undying deeds happen as hoped”—that the “hope” all sacred activists keep alive in their hearts and struggle to enact in their actions, while surrendering the timing of its realization to the Divine does, when the Divine wills it, not only flowers but flowers in a way far richer and more powerful than anything they could have imagined. This is the one message of the Gita, of the Gospels, of the Mahayana scriptures, of Lao-Tzu and Sri

Aurobindo, and it is the message those of us who refuse to give up on humanity in its hour of greatest danger most need to steady and direct their lives.

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Generosity fearlessness knowledge energy—the nature of a  
king  
Is these four in fullness

To be an authentic sacred activist is to be “royal,” to embody the grace of the sturdy and beautiful in selfless action for the Divine and the divine in humanity. This couplet, with sublime brilliance, demonstrates what qualities the “royal” sacred activist needs to cultivate and fuse together in their separate and interconnected fullness: generosity and magnanimity in all situations; freedom from fear born from surrender to the One, and the profound and deathless self-knowledge it graces; the passionate and compassionate energy that intense devotion to God engenders, inflames, and sustains.

What is especially revealing in this couplet and in Tiruvalluvar’s description of his “royal” ideal is the emphasis he places on “energy” by putting it last. Far too often, a half-baked understanding of Indian spirituality, including by Indians themselves, has exalted a passive renunciation over the dynamic one that makes a rich and full divine human life possible. For Tiruvalluvar, as I have tried to show throughout this commentary, life is God’s field of transfiguration, and the human being is potentially a living channel of active miraculous grace.

It is this glorious and universally empowering vision that irradiates all aspects of the Kural and makes it an indispensable guide for our time. We will either continue in our blind and savage addictions and die out, or risk the adventure the Kural celebrates: embody grace and co-create with the Divine a new humanity and a new world. The choice is ours.

ANDREW HARVEY

*This introduction is dedicated to my beloved friend and co-conspirator Ellen  
Gunter, who embodies sturdy and beautiful grace.*

## INTRODUCTION

### *An Unbiased Heart Adorns Wisdom: Some Thoughts on the Tirukkural\**

I grew up with the Tirukkural, but not in the way you might think. I did not learn its couplets by heart, nor have appropriate verses cited to me to teach me how to be properly Tamil: good, generous, modest. Rather, for this urban, English-educated, middle-class girl, it hovered in the background, lacing my childhood memories: Tirukkural verses on public transport buses, startling white against the sage-green drawing the eye, a curling Tamil script, incomprehensible to me, illiterate in the language, and next to it, in florid Roman and turgid English, an utterly opaque translation; rumbling past the busy intersection at the city center, sighting the mute, unsmiling, forbidding statue of the poem's author rooted at the entrance of the Sanskrit College; another granite-black statue of the author with the sea at his back; a huge chariot monument honoring the poet and his poem, looming over an arterial node at the heart of the city; hearing the poem's famous first couplet open the popular Tamil films of K. Balachander (1930–2014) and singing along with it; being told the tale of the needle the poet placed by his banana leaf to pick up stray rice that might spill while he ate or when his wife, Vāsuki, served him his meal—he never needed it, for neither wasted a single grain of rice; serve like her and eat like him, was the implication. These were formative experiences of the Tirukkural, which embedded itself within me as boring, stodgy, preachy, and didactic. I could not fathom its power nor understand the ferocious affection it engendered in lovers of Tamil. I eventually got there, as a mentor predicted I would, taken in by the Kural's economical form and the enduring wisdom of its content. With this revelation, late though it came, I was simply joining legions of readers, listeners, and commentators, really, *enthusiasts*, of this eminently quotable meditation on ethics and a well-lived life. A few citations, apt for our times, make the point:

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Action that fits is virtue—action  
That doesn't is vice

83

The life that cherishes strangers each day

Help does not measure help—the heart of the helped  
Measures help

Fairness means speech without bias—when bias  
Is absent within\*

Whether inscribed on buses or memorized and quoted, Kural verses such as these have come to be understood as fundamental expressions of Tamilness. Centuries of commentaries and the more recent flood of translations into multiple languages have cemented the link between this ancient text and modern conceptions of Tamil identity. Thus interwoven, especially in the past one hundred years, into the very fabric of what it means to be Tamil, it is impossible to separate the Kural from its reception and the long, teeming rivers of receptive histories, into which Thomas Pruiksma's exquisite translation now merges itself.

One might say the Tirukkural has two trajectories of reception that have cemented its place as an iconic Tamil text and as a jewel of world literature. In the first is its laudatory status within the Tamil literary tradition as *tamīl maṛai* (Revealed Tamil), *poṇṇāmoḷi* (Speech without Falsity, i.e., unimpeachable truth), and *deyvanūl* (Divine Text), affirmed by the long history of available commentary on the text, beginning in the eleventh century and continuing into the twenty-first century. While ten commentaries are mentioned in a text called the *Peruntokai* (Great Collection), only five have survived.\* In the Indic intellectual tradition, commentary is not merely about exegesis but equally about canonicity and an assertion of status for both author and text. So, if one wanted to be taken seriously as a Tamil scholar, you commented on the Tirukkural, its dense succinct couplets, its wordplay, the meditations on almost every aspect of life, providing the ideal canvas on which to sketch one's own imaginative reading and interpretation, and in doing so, asserting one's intellectual heft.

These commentaries, composed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries—the peak period for Kural exposition—laid the strong foundations for the text's reception, even as the meaning of the text and the symbolism of its author changed to accommodate societal needs. In the absence of any definitive autobiographical information about the text's author and the text's apparently universalist ethics, medieval interpreters could shape it to their ends. For instance, Parimēlalakar (c. thirteenth century), the Kural's most famous commentator, was a Tamil Vaishnava brahmin, and his commentary, which liberally quotes from Tamil

Vaishnava devotional literature, reflects these religious commitments, while European encounters with the poem, like that of the eminent nineteenth-century scholar and missionary G. U. Pope (1820–1908), read into it early Christian influence.

If commentary is the primary means of ensuring a text's longevity and canonicity, in the premodern and early modern periods, beginning in the eighteenth century, translation into European languages, arguably, comes to occupy that space.<sup>†</sup> Most of these translations, undertaken by Christian missionaries, were deliberately incomplete, choosing to leave out the book's vivid, sensuous third section devoted to love. Of these, the earliest was the 1730 Latin translation of Joseph Beschi (1680–1747), while the brilliant British civil servant Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819), who dedicated his life to the study of this text, left a partial English translation of 120 verses, published in 1812. A German translation by August Friedrich Caemmerer (1767–1837) came out in 1803, while E. S. Ariel (1818–1854) brought out a French translation in 1848. G. U. Pope, the influential nineteenth-century Christian missionary scholar mentioned above, published the first complete English translation of the Tirukkural in 1886.

Many of these translation efforts of the Kural emerged against the backdrop of debates about Tamil's literary history, even as the great U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855–1942) reintroduced long forgotten texts into the canon.\* In the absence of access to these earlier works, early European encounters with Tamil deemed the Tirukkural the oldest extant Tamil literary work and marked it (inaccurately) as the beginning of Tamil literary production. Later research corrected this hypothesis. The Tirukkural is without question an early work, composed between the fourth and fifth centuries, some three centuries after the classical period of poetry, referred to as the Sangam Age.<sup>†</sup>

For such an important poem, we know surprisingly little about its origins or its author. E. S. Ariel, the nineteenth-century French translator of the Kural who pithily characterized the masterpiece, in a letter to a colleague, as a “book without a name by an author without a name.”<sup>‡</sup> The title Tirukkural simply refers to its metrical form (the *kural*), with the prefix *tiru* a marker of honor, sacrality, and reverence. There is nothing in the body of the Tirukkural about the poet—in a sense, he is utterly absent—allowing scholars to offer up various theories on his precise affiliation. Most scholars today agree that given his use of a distinctly Jain vocabulary for god and the text's emphasis on asceticism, that the author was likely a Jain.\* So, the myth of the poet, and indeed his very name—Tiruvalluvar—emerges several centuries after the composition of his poem, sometime in the tenth or eleventh century, in a poem of fifty-three short verses called the *Tiruvalluva Mālai* (The Garland on Tiruvalluvar). Here too the information is scant. We only hear that the Tirukkural, tested at the

Sangam Academy of Poets by pompous poets, bests all their petty verses and is divinely decreed as superior. This pivotal, albeit tropic, scene and the poet's name, Vaḷḷuvar, become the kernels around which the story of the poet and his famous poem are built.

The story of Vaḷḷuvar no doubt circulated in oral and folk forms prior to the nineteenth century, but it is during this period, under the power of a thriving print culture in Tamil country, that it begins to consolidate. The poet's name, Vaḷḷuvar, is itself the departure point for his legend, for it can mean weaver (*vaḷḷuvan*) or can also refer to a special caste of ritual drummers. Regardless of which interpretation one prefers, it is indisputable that the name gestures to a low social caste status. Thus, as the legend builds, his social identity becomes crucial. He is of mixed parentage—his father is a brahmin and his mother a Dalit—and is abandoned at birth to be raised first by a weaver and then by an agriculturalist. He is the youngest of seven children, all of whom are similarly abandoned but transcend their circumstances to achieve fame of various sorts, some becoming great poets, while others become goddesses. He is itinerant, traveling to sacred mountains in the Tamil country, to the coastal city of Mylai, to Madurai, the center of Tamil learning. It is in Madurai that the famous test of the Kural occurs at the Sangam Academy of Poets, and thus humbled, each of the Sangam poets composes a verse in praise of Vaḷḷuvar's poem, creating the *Tiruvaḷḷuva Mālai*\* He eventually returns to Mylai to live out his last days as a weaver. Curiously, Vaḷḷuvar's iconography, which emerges alongside the written versions of his story, belies this tale of an iconoclast, of a traveler, a weaver, or a drummer of lowly origins. Instead, he is depicted draped in the robes of an ascetic, with a flowing beard, clutching a palm-leaf manuscript in his left hand, while his right either grips a stylus or makes the gesture of wisdom. These images, some of which are consecrated, like at the Vaḷḷuvar temple in the city of Chennai, replicate the popular iconography of the wise sage and, in doing so, make the poet less ambiguous and more scrutable than he is.

The meaning of the Vaḷḷuvar legend and the history of the Tirukkural's commentaries have been masterfully explored by Stuart Blackburn and Norman Cutler, respectively.† They both observe that the Tirukkural has long served as a fulcrum in the debates about Tamil literature and, by extension, concerns about Tamil identity. As the intricacies of this complex social history are beyond the scope of this short piece, I will refrain from repeating their arguments. Suffice to say that each has shown how stories and commentaries reflect the political and social concerns of their period, even as they, like Vaḷḷuvar's iconography, narrow the possibilities presented by a nameless poet who could have been a Jain, a Hindu, an ascetic, a householder, a yogi, or a synthesis of all these identities. But leaving aside these important questions about authorship and meaning

making, what kinds of answers could we find then if we shifted our focus to the texts implied audience?

The Kural is divided into three unequal books (*pāl*), concerning three domains of life in the world—virtue (*aṛam*), wealth (*poruḷ*), and love (*iṇṇam*). The middle book is its longest section, accounting for sixty-nine chapters (39–108), while the first is thirty-eight (1–38) and the last, a mere twenty-four (109–133). This uneven division might suggest something of where the text’s emphasis lies, or conversely, where it sees the greatest need for the counsel it offers—in good governance and polity. A kingdom is only as virtuous and good as a king and his counsel, and thus, we have in Book 2, chapters on the Splendor of Kings (39), Good Rule (55), Harsh Rule (56), and an entire section on the Arms of Government (64–95). Curiously, it is in this subsection that we encounter two meditations on two kinds of women—the courtesan (911–920) and the wife (901–910). The advice to the men (but not the women, of course) is the same: be wary of them. A strong man, a *virtuous* man, is not beguiled by either wife or courtesan, and only the heedless fall prey to the charms of women. Two examples from Thomas Pruiksma’s lovely translations will make the point:

On courtesans, the poet says:

915

The wise of good minds do not seek the thin pleasure  
Of those whose goods are common

While he has this to say about a man who is thrall of his wife:

902

The wealth of one craving his wife without care  
Brings shame on himself and all men

But perhaps most damning, and one that seems to give the game away, is this couplet:

909

For him who does only his wife’s bidding—no virtue  
No wealth no pleasure

Virtue, wealth, and pleasure *are* the building blocks and aims of a good life (the Sanskrit *puruṣārtha*), the fourth of which is release from the world. That the Kural so explicitly denies the possibility of the very aims and purpose of a good life to a man who listens to his wife not only affirms that such pursuits are only available to men (and indeed,

men of a particular status) but warns of the dire consequences should a

man not assert his dominance. Indeed, in this very section, we hear the flip side—

907

Modesty in a woman is far more glorious  
Than servility in a man

In the world of the Kural, the primary audience is male, and the well-lived life he should aspire to includes a chaste wife and good sons. The man should aim for a female life-mate (51–60) who reveres no god but her husband (55), and that all is ashes if the wife lacks glory (52). In the section that follows on offspring (61–70), the praise of gender-neutral children, such as in this verse—

63

It is said one's children are one's wealth—their wealth  
Comes from one's deeds

—gives way to an emphasis on sons as the bearers of one's future:

67

The good of father to son—to make him  
Stand forth among men

69

A mother rejoices even more than at birth hearing  
That her son commands wisdom

Unsurprisingly, there is nothing in the 1,330 couplets of the Tirukkural about daughters, the joy they bring, or that they too might command wisdom. So, despite its lofty and deserved status as an enduring book of wisdom, the Kural too is marked by the social conditions of its time, which define women primarily in relation to men, locates power in their chastity, and their worthiness as mothers to sons. While we have a smattering of female poets in the classical period (1–3 CE), and a female poet here and there until the twentieth century, the female perspective is largely absent from the Tamil literary corpus. In this, the Tamil canon is not dissimilar to other canons the world over. But I would argue that the Tirukkural does offer us possibility to read against the grain and to make a different kind of meaning; these can be found in its structure and in the third and final book on love (titled simply “Love” in Pruiksma’s translation).

This last, and shortest, book contains some of the most poignant, evocative verses on erotic love in all its forms. Although clearly indebted to the Tamil classical literary tradition’s exploration of interiority, the



Tirukkural strips its predecessors' complicated, allusive imagery and provides in its place a distilled, dense accounting of this most fundamental of human relationships. Here too there is universalizing—a love that radiates from an ideal (heteronormative) couple within the poem to encompass anyone who has known it:

1166

Love is an ocean of bliss but the pain  
It brings is greater

But there is particularity too, the *particular* love shared by a man and a woman, and remarkably, we hear the woman's voice. Her love is not different in texture or in intensity than the man's. She yearns for him as he does for her.

He says, on first seeing her:

1083

I did not know death but now  
I do—Fierce feminine eyes

And she says when apart from him:

1152

His sight brought pleasure but fearing he'll go  
His touch brings pain

Each is fiercely connected to the other, as though one body. So, he says:

1122

What connects body and breath—that  
Connects me to her

And she reflects:

1185

Look there—he goes—look here—this pallor  
Comes to my body

The description of love, by both the male and female personae in this section, is largely tropic: he is wounded by her eyes; she grows pale in his absence, and so on. Yet, unlike in the rest of the poem, which privileges male experience of the world, in the Book of Love, we find women both as objects and subjects. Even if this depiction is stylized and largely imagines women as passive (they are usually rooted in place, left to suffer a man's departure or his infidelity), and even if the role for women is narrowly

circumscribed to the realm of the interior, of domesticity, I would suggest that the universalizing pull of many of these couplets affords the opportunity to transcend their tropic particularity. Who in the grand throes of love and filled with doubt at the beloved's attachment hasn't experienced a version of this woman's words?

1204

Am I there too in his heart—he  
Is always in mine

The Book of Love offers rich possibilities for a recuperative reading practice. But what of the Tirukkural as a whole? Here, I would like to return to the text's structure. As mentioned above, the Kural is divided into three books, which are themselves divided into several discrete, thematic chapters. Each of these chapters has ten couplets. If we accept that the Kural is a unitary work, then the chapters and the books into which they are set build toward a conclusion.\* For instance, centuries of commentators have accepted that the absence of a book on liberation (*viṭu/mokṣa*) is because the pursuit of the first three aims—virtue, wealth, and love—guarantees the fourth.† In other words, liberation is to be found and achieved in a thoroughly well-lived, *complete* life. But beyond this overarching argument about the nature and purpose of life, there are micro-arguments too that exist within the text. Let us take, for instance, the Kural's opening sections, which proffer advice on a range of topics to a non-gendered audience. For example, the section “The Home Life” (41–50) says this:

42

To the impoverished the forsaken and the dead  
The one at home is friend

And then this:

45

If a life at home has love and virtue—that  
Is its root and flower

The aphorisms apply equally to men and women, perhaps even to the company of children and a wide extended family. But the very next section, “In Praise of One's Life Companion” (51–60), makes it clear that the text is primarily concerned with the home life of men, which is itself tied to women's chastity, fidelity, and devotion:

57

What safety is the safety of walls—the safety within  
Keeps her safe

So, if we read the Kural as a unitary text, then the later chapters on children, courtesans, fidelity, and so on seem only to confirm that the Kural's universalist ethics are not intended for everyone. But what if this is not the only way to read the text? What if we see the text's structure as supple and flexible? And indeed, this is also how centuries of the Tirukkural's interlocutors have engaged with it, extracting verses here and there, citing them to make a point about generosity, virtue, goodness, governance, or hospitality. That is, the Tirukkural's couplets are both meant to exist as independent, context-free aphorisms as well as embedded within a much longer ethical, didactic argument. Thus, a verse like this—

431

Those free of anger pride and depravity  
Attain wealth with glory

—can be placed on the walls of a public bus to be read and reflected on by any number of passengers, of any class, any caste, any gender. The individual couplets shine on their own, like unset gemstones, and as an elegantly crafted necklace, where each jewel contributes to the beauty of the whole. It is in the ability of the Tirukkural to straddle the general and the particular, for its wisdom to be rooted in Tamil conceptions of gender, hospitality, or generosity, yet inviting a reader to go beyond them, that has ensured its vibrant afterlife. Capacious and puzzling, the Tirukkural invites constant contemplation, both as a complete text of 1,330 couplets and as a collection of 1,330 aphorisms.

Over the past eighteen months, we have lived through a global pandemic that has confronted us all with the difficult questions of what it means to live well. We have asked ourselves how to live in physical isolation, what responsibilities we have to ourselves and to our kin, and to our communities. Across the world, many have faced the apathy and cruelty of governments and of a governance that has failed to ensure the well-being of citizens. Amidst the chaos, we have come to appreciate our interconnectedness, that the wellness of one requires the wellness of all. The Kural expresses this in an aphorism composed as if for our times:

950

Healer patient medicine preparer—these four  
Together are medicine

But even as some in the world glimpse a life after the pandemic, we feel the blistering effects of catastrophic climate change bearing down on us.

No being can be without water—nothing can flow  
For anyone without rain

—and immediately recognize a fundamental but oft forgotten truth, that human flourishing hinges on ecological flourishing, a lesson the Tirukkural teaches, but with a light, allusive touch. I, like countless others before me, have found comfort and counsel in the verses of this marvelous text in these trying times. To live as the wise Kural advises us to—in a state of chronic, cultivated empathy and in service of others—is indeed to live right and to live well.

ARCHANA VENKATESAN

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\* This is an excerpt from the second half of a famous kural:

*kēṭum perukkamum illalla neñcattuk*  
*kōṭamai cāṇṇōrkku aṇi* (115)

Translated by Thomas Pruiksma as:

Rising and falling have never not been—an unbiased heart  
Adorns wisdom

\* All translations in my introduction are by Thomas Pruiksma.

\* These are the commentaries of Maṇakkuṭavar, Pariperumāl, Paritīyār, Parimēlaḷakar, and Kālīṅkar. The earliest commentary is that of Maṇakkuṭavar, while Parimēlaḷakar's is the latest and the most well known.

† The earliest extant translation of the Tirukkural appears to be into Malayalam in the late sixteenth century. Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 127n99.

\* For a discussion placing the Tirukkural within larger Tamil literary history, and about its translation and print history, see Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 123–27, and David Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 91–98.

† The most important of these figures is Robert Caldwell (1814–1891), a Christian missionary, largely credited with identifying Tamil as belonging to the Dravidian language family. He regarded the Tirukkural to be Tamil literature's oldest work, which he dated erroneously to the tenth century.

‡ “Ce livre sans nom, par un auteur sans nom.” Quoted in G. U. Pope, *The Sacred Kurral Tiruvalluva Nayanar* (London: W. H. Allen and Company, 1886), i.

\* For a discussion of this vocabulary, see Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 125n86, and for a discussion of the poet's Jain orientation/religious orientation more generally, see Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 95.

\* The story of the composition of the verses in praise of the Kural (i.e., the *Tiruvalluvar Mālai*) by the Sangam poets' collective is clearly apocryphal. The Sangam test is a powerful, recurring motif in several stories about similar kinds of poets, and it is used very effectively in the Valluvar legend. For a thorough discussion of the Valluvar legend, see Stuart Blackburn, "Corruption and Redemption: The Legend of Valluvar and Tamil Literary History," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (May 2000): 449–82.

† For a discussion of the long history of Tirukkural commentary, see Norman Cutler, "Interpreting Tirukkural: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (October-December 1992): 549–66.

\* David Shulman argues against the unity of the Tirukkural, although he sees cohesion in the Book of Love. Shulman, *Tamil: A Biography*, 94–96.

† One might also theorize that dropping the fourth book might have been one way to appeal to a broad audience, to affirm the text's nonsectarian leanings. A book on liberation would have necessitated the articulation of a specific soteriology—Jain, Brahmanical-Hindu, Yogic, Buddhist—immediately narrowing its audience. That the Kural's premodern commentators represent a range of religious affiliations speaks to the capaciousness of the text, absent this fourth book.

## CHERISHING GUESTS

### *A Translator's Preface to Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural*

Twenty-two years ago, when I first lived in Madurai in the state of Tamil Nadu, I went to visit the home of a student at the college where I was teaching. Meenakshi Sundram lived on a narrow lane not far from the Meenakshi Temple in this venerable and beautiful South Indian city. His home was only a few rooms, but they filled with family, friends, and neighbors, all eager to greet the teacher from abroad who could somehow speak a little Tamil. Meenakshi's parents fed me a sumptuous feast, and at the end of the lovely and leisurely evening, they surprised me with a gift: two books of Tamil poetry. One was a collection by a contemporary poet; the other, a special edition of Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural. Meenakshi's father pointed to the cover of the second, dust-jacketed book. "Everything you need to know is in here," he said. "There are chapters on every aspect of life. When you have learned Tamil fully, you must read this book well."

I had no idea at the time how my interest in the language was going to blossom. It would be years before I could delve fully into any kind of Tamil literature, let alone an ancient classic. But I did know something of the importance of the Tirukkural, one of the most celebrated books in Tamil's two millennia of literary history. I'd seen quotes from it posted overhead in the city buses and had heard my Tamil teacher, Dr. K. V. Ramakoti, refer to several of the book's memorable verses. And so, in 2003 and 2004, when I returned to India on a Fulbright grant, I spent the second half of my stay studying the Tirukkural with Dr. Ramakoti as a guest in his home, tying the work to what I'd learned from him about the literature that precedes it and how different poets understand and express the relationship between people and place. Each day we read another chapter from the book, exploring not only the poetry itself but all the major commentaries that have grown up around it. As part of the process, I also memorized a selection of more than half of its verses, a far cry from the tradition of learning the entire volume by heart but enough at least to start getting some of its rhythms into my body.

The Tirukkural, or more simply, the Kural, is indeed an extraordinary work. Scholars often date it between the third and fifth centuries CE, at the end of what is known as the Sangam period, a time of literary flourishing in Tamil Nadu. The name of the book combines the honorific prefix *tiru*

—“eminent,” “beautiful,” “holy”—with the name of the Tamil verse form that Tiruvalluvar employs, the *kuṛaḷ veṇṇā*. More than one translator has referred to the kural form as a couplet, but doing so risks a misunderstanding. While a kural does consist of two lines of poetry, they are not matched metrically, as a couplet by Shakespeare or Pope might be. The first line of a kural contains four feet (*cīr*, in Tamil), while the second contains a mere two and a half. In addition, a kural is not end-rhymed but rather follows a sophisticated and nuanced pattern of assonance and consonance that has characterized Tamil poetry from its beginnings. Within the rhythm of each line, key vowel sounds are expected to correspond with each other (assonance), and key consonants, at the beginnings of words as well as within them, are expected to match exactly (consonance). It is an exceedingly compact and demanding form. (During my Fulbright year, I learned to write Tamil kurals myself, composing a handful of verses each morning before breakfast and showing them to Dr. Ramakoti for correction and emendation. They were not great poetry, but writing them deepened my understanding of Tamil prosody considerably.)

Tiruvalluvar uses this form to elucidate what it means to live a good life. Each chapter of the Kural consists of ten kurals on a single theme, such as friendship, hospitality, or rain. These verses are both complete in themselves and part of a larger whole in which all the different verses complement, augment, and amplify each other. The book’s 133 chapters, in turn, are arranged into sections that cover three of the four aims prescribed by Hindu tradition—virtue, wealth, and love. Most commentators claim, and I’m inclined to agree, that Tiruvalluvar leaves out the fourth aim—liberation from the cycle of birth and death—because if a person pursues the first three wholeheartedly, the fourth is a natural result.

The book thus covers a vast array of human knowledge, experience, and wisdom, offering an intricate interweaving of ethics and poetry, full of wordplay, sharp imagery, and rhythmic sophistication. Its scope is so sweeping that some scholars have argued that Tiruvalluvar isn’t actually a person but rather an emblem for a collective persona whose poems have been gathered into one volume. Either way, however, it is the work itself that matters. In the years since my first entry into its pages, Dr. Ramakoti would sometimes remark to me, “Wouldn’t it be good if someone did a proper literary translation of the Tirukkural, drawing on all the commentaries that we studied together?” I would always agree, but it never crossed my mind that this hypothetical someone might be me. Until unexpectedly, five years ago, it suddenly occurred to me to try.

When I told Dr. Ramakoti that I was starting to make a translation, he exclaimed, “Oh good, you finally got it.” It may have been obvious to him all along, but I don’t think I could have even entertained the thought until I felt my knowledge of Tamil was clear enough and my practice as a poet

solid enough to do some kind of justice to the task. Which is perhaps why he never suggested it to me directly. He knew it had to occur to me in its own time.

One may well ask why a new translation is even needed. The Kural is by far the most translated book from Tamil literature, with over eighty translations into different world languages, some made directly and many more made by way of English, since English serves as a common language in both India and beyond. Many of these translations, however, are neither literary nor in print, and several are entirely unreadable. The best of them, that of P. S. Sundaram, captures Tiruvalluvar's brevity and playfulness but does little to suggest his patterns of consonance and assonance. Here, for instance, is how Sundaram renders a verse from chapter 11, "Gratitude":

103

Help given regardless of return  
Is wider than the sea\*

And here is a transliteration of this verse, with several elements of its patterns in bold:

103

payaṇ **tūkkār** seyta utavi **nayaṇ tūkkiṇ** **naṇmai** kaṭalir  
peritu

Very little of these patterns has made it into Sundaram's translation. My experience, however, suggests that more is possible. Even if one can't achieve exactly the same effect with the same means—the same exact sounds in the same exact order—one can try to achieve a similar effect with similar means. That, in any case, is what I've tried to do, while also trying to honor root meanings. In this verse, for instance, *tūkkār* means literally "those not weighing":

103

The **weight** of good done without **weighing** results—  
**grace**  
**Greater** than oceans

Two other aspects of Tiruvalluvar's poetry have eluded previous translations: the dissimilar lengths of the lines in a kural and the absence of punctuation. (Tamil didn't have or need punctuation as we know it until the language encountered English.) Accordingly, I've tried to honor this dissymmetry in each verse and have also drawn on the example of the North American poet W. S. Merwin, who relinquished punctuation while writing his fifth book, *The Moving Target*. He felt, and I feel, that



punctuation staples a poem to a page, pinning it within the rational protocol of written language and literal-minded prose. I want instead to evoke the oral and aural qualities of Tiruvalluvar's intelligence, which cannot be fully captured by mere rationality. He speaks to all of our senses with all of his. So although at times I use a dash to make the meaning clearer, as well as initial capitals to suggest the formality of the verse, I have strenuously avoided any other kind of punctuation. This is meant to encourage readers to read the poems out loud and to allow their breath and their ears to participate in the discovery of the verses' many patterns and meanings.

In some cases the dashes are also meant to suggest a form of expression in Tamil that doesn't have an exact equivalent in English. Many of Tiruvalluvar's statements equate one thing to another, as we might do in English with a form of the verb "to be." I might say, for instance, "My name is Thomas," and we'd understand that the verb "is" equates "my name" and "Thomas." In Tamil, however, one doesn't need a verb to make such a statement. One can simply place the two elements beside each other and their connection will be clearly understood. What looks literally like "My name Thomas" means in fact "My name is Thomas." But in English, if we write "My name Thomas," we're not really writing in English. Unless, that is, we say the statement out loud and add a pause of some significance between "name" and the name itself: "My name—Thomas." Now we have something that brings the two forms of expression a bit closer. And notice that this not only returns us to language as it's spoken but to the drama that such a pause out loud can convey.

I have thus used dashes to indicate places where a pause may help to bring the poem off the page. Here's an example from chapter 2, "The Glory of Rain":

15

That which ruins and raises up  
The ruined—rain

One could, of course, translate the dash here as "is," but I feel that it's closer to the spirit and energy of the original to convey that meaning with a more meaningful silence. Doing so also keeps the poem more open to possibility and to different interpretations, as all good poems tend to do. Throughout this translation, if a verse does not seem at first to make sense to you, speak it out loud and you may find it revealing its patterns of meaning to your ear. Poetry begins in the ear of the heart, which we can learn to hear through the ear of our body.

In order to interweave some of the contexts in which these verses find meaning, I have included some brief notes to explain key cultural and

literary ideas. These notes, taken together, form a kind of commentary, one that corresponds to what is known in Tamil as “a commentary of notes.” I first encountered this kind of commentary reading another Tamil classic, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ’s *Cilappatikāram* (*The Tale of an Anklet*), and appreciate the way it gives just enough background for readers to enter the writing more fully without taking over the process entirely. In that spirit, I’ve given notes to amplify the connotations of words and to offer further insight into the verses themselves, especially about what goes on behind the scenes of the translation. For instance,

although one might wish to translate key words from the Tamil in the same way throughout the book, this isn’t always possible or even desirable, given how meanings can shift in different contexts. Hence, the notes clarify where different words in English may be translating the same word in Tamil, or where the same word in English may be rendering, at different times, different words in the original.

The notes also serve another purpose. Present-day readers of the Kural in Tamil almost never read the work without a commentary of some kind. In making this translation, I have referred to the oldest traditional commentaries available, written between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Where it has seemed helpful to do so, I have included certain observations from the last and most authoritative of these commentators, Parimēḷaḷakar, as well as from the earliest and in some ways my favorite, Maṇakkuṭavar. In this way I mean to suggest how interpretive frameworks such as theirs are part of the experience of reading Tiruvalluvar in Tamil. If at times I offer a pair of conflicting interpretations, I don’t do so to say that these are the only ones possible but rather to suggest there may be still others.

Two last textual notes: Most of the time, in writing Tamil words in English, I have used the transliteration system of the *Tamil Lexicon*, published by the University of Madras. However, though such systems can be useful for scholars, the diacritical marks they include can also serve inadvertently to mystify a language and hide it behind a screen of scholarly expertise. So, in some cases, where it feels right to do so, I have transliterated words according to my ear instead, so that a reader can hear what I’m talking about without recourse to a system that requires some initiation to make sense of. I have also omitted the diacritics on Tamil (Tamil), Tirukkural (Tirukkural), and Tiruvalluvar (Tiruvalluvar), in honor of how these names have become naturalized in English.

Finally, I have followed the practice of most Tamil editions of the Kural and ordered the verses in each chapter according to Parimēḷaḷakar’s commentary. (Other commentators, such as Maṇakkuṭavar, sometimes order the verses differently.) I have also included a number of Parimēḷaḷakar’s insights about how various chapters form larger groupings,

and how these groupings in turn help us in reading the poems. But I would encourage the reader to keep returning to the verses themselves and to remain open to one's own discoveries. The Kural is not simply a book to read but a work to engage and converse with. That is how its verses come most alive, able to startle and illuminate.

Each reader and listener will find verses that speak directly to their own experience. Here are three that I love and that have helped me become more fully who I am. In chapter 8, "Having Love," Tiruvalluvar speaks of the kind of love that brings families and friends together. The first verse of its ten has helped me remain open to both the sorrow and the beauty of life's comings and goings:

71

Is there a latch for love—the fullness of one's heart  
Shows in the tears that well

When I have sorrowed in parting, I have found consolation in Tiruvalluvar's reminder that this sorrow grows from fullness and from daring to say yes to love in the first place.

Another verse, from chapter 11, "Gratitude," has tempered my tendency to dwell on what feels wrong in the past:

108

Forgetting good done is not good—forgetting at once  
What is not good—good

It may seem strange here that Tiruvalluvar would counsel forgetting, especially when he speaks elsewhere of power and justice. But what I've taken from this verse is that the longer I nurse a sense of being wronged, the less energy I have to remember and enact goodness. Goodness grows from goodness remembered.

And in the first kural of chapter 9, "Hospitality," Tiruvalluvar encapsulates the point of having and upholding the householder's life:

81

The life of cherishing and being at home—for cherishing  
guests  
With generosity

I have known this generosity in Tamil Nadu beyond anything I could ever have asked for—from students, from friends, from people who have made me part of their family. And so I dedicate this translation to all the people of Tamil Nadu who have welcomed me into their homes, and especially to the late Dr. K. V. Ramakoti, who taught me far more than just

language. He read every line of this translation, pushing me to ever greater fidelity to the Tamil and ever greater intensity in the English. I was able to spend the summer of 2017 tossing these verses back and forth with him in his home and will never forget the gift of that summer, nor the gift of all the time he spent offering what he knows. It is because of him that I am finally able to respond fully to the gift that Meenakshi Sundram and his family gave to me all those years ago.

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\* Tiruvalluvar, *The Kural*, trans. P. S. Sundaram (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

PART ONE

# VIRTUE

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# **I INTRODUCTION**

# I. IN PRAISE OF

1

All speech starts from ah—as the world  
Starts from God

2

Without touching the feet of one who is truth  
What good is study

3

At the feet of a mind in flower a person  
Lives long upon earth

4

At the feet of a mind beyond like and dislike a person  
Knows no suffering

5

The two deeds that bring darkness bring nothing to those  
Singing the true glory of God

6

A person lives long on the truthful path  
Of those free of all five senses

7

Except at the feet of one without peer—hard  
To escape the heart's suffering

8

Except at the feet of an ocean of compassion—hard  
To cross the other two

9

Like senses without sense—the head that won't bow  
To those embodying all virtue

10

A swimmer cannot swim the sea of birth  
Without touching the feet of God

## 2. THE GLORY OF RAIN

11

Because rain gives us the world—fitting to know it  
As ambrosia

12

Making food fit for feeding and itself  
Food that feeds—rain

13

If skies fail to rain hunger racks the wide earth  
Surrounded on all sides by seas

14

The plowmen won't plow if the wealth  
Of storm clouds has withered

15

That which ruins and raises up  
The ruined—rain

16

If clouds do not let their drops fall—hard to see even  
One tip of green grass

17

If clouds of lightning do not gather and give  
Even the great seas will shrink

18

For beings in heaven no festivals no prayers  
If the heavens dry up below

19

No generosity or austerity can grace this great world  
If the skies grant nothing above

20

No being can be without water—nothing can flow  
For anyone without rain



### 3. THE GREATNESS OF LETTING GO

- 21  
Good books agree—the great let go in that way  
Which is theirs
- 22  
Letting go is how great—great as how many  
Have died on earth
- 23  
Knowing the two and choosing to let go—no  
Greater glory in this world
- 24  
He who leads the five with the prod of solidity—  
A seed in the best of all lands
- 25  
To the power that commands all five Indra himself  
Lord of gods bears witness
- 26  
The great do the impossible—the small do  
What everyone can
- 27  
The world is theirs who fathom all five—  
Sight sound touch taste smell
- 28  
The secret spoken by those of true words  
Shows their greatness on earth
- 29  
From those who have climbed character—hard to stand even  
One moment of rage
- 30  
Those who let go embody grace—they show  
Compassion to all

#### 4. THE IMPERATIVE OF RIGHT ACTION

- 31  
It grants eternity and also grants wealth—what gains  
A life more than doing right
- 32  
Nothing gains more than virtue—nothing destroys more  
Than forgetting it
- 33  
As best as one can do right without ceasing  
Everywhere that right can be done
- 34  
Right action is purity of heart-and-mind—all else  
Nothing but noise
- 35  
Envy desire anger bitter words—right action  
Is freedom from all four
- 36  
Do right without waiting—at death it remains  
Beside one undying
- 37  
No need to speak of virtue—look who is borne  
And who bears the palanquin
- 38  
It closes the way back like a weir—enacting what's good  
Without wasting one day
- 39  
Right action brings happiness—all else  
Oblivion and pain
- 40  
Action that fits is virtue—action  
That doesn't is vice

## **II HOUSEHOLDING**

## 5. THE HOME LIFE

- 41  
One at home stands in goodness—foundation  
Of the three other stations
- 42  
To the impoverished the forsaken and the dead  
The one at home is friend
- 43  
Nothing is higher than honoring the five realms—  
Spirits gods guests relations self
- 44  
A life that shares food and fears wrong—way  
Without end in the world
- 45  
If a life at home has love and virtue—that  
Is its root and flower
- 46  
If one does right living at home—what good is  
Doing anything elsewhere
- 47  
One true to the life at home stands above  
All others who strive
- 48  
The home life that guides others—greater  
Than greatest austerity
- 49  
The life at home is itself right action—and good  
When free of all blame
- 50  
Those on earth thriving in the life at home—held  
Among gods in heaven

## 6. IN PRAISE OF ONE'S LIFE COMPANION

51

She whose greatness suits home and her husband's  
Abundance alike—that is a life companion

52

If a wife lacks a wife's glory even with all other glories  
The home life has none

53

What's lacking if a wife is great—what's not  
If a wife is not

54

What is greater than a wife if she bears  
The great strength of fidelity

55

She who rises revering no god but her husband  
Says rain and the rain pours down

56

A true wife—one without weakness who cares for herself  
Her husband and the power of words

57

What safety is the safety of walls—the safety within  
Keeps her safe

58

If she gains him that gained her a wife gains  
The greatness of heaven

59

He cannot tread before scorn like a lion—he whose wife  
Does not sparkle with praise

60

A wife with glory is grace—and bearing  
Good children its jewel

## 7. HAVING CHILDREN

61

Of all we may have we know nothing higher than having  
Children with knowledge

62

Untouched by wrong in all seven lives—those  
Whose children shun evil

63

It is said one's children are one's wealth—their wealth  
Comes from one's deeds

64

Sweeter than ambrosia by far—the food the tiny hands  
Of one's children have scattered

65

The touch of one's children—pleasure to the body—their words—  
Pleasure to the ear

66

Those who don't hear the babble of their children  
Call the flute and the lyre sweet

67

The good of father to son—to make him  
Stand forth among men

68

Children whose knowledge exceeds one's own  
Delight all lives on earth

69

A mother rejoices even more than at birth hearing  
That her son commands wisdom

70

The aid of son to father—to hear people say  
What did he do to have him

## 8. HAVING LOVE

- 71  
Is there a latch for love—the fullness of one's heart  
Shows in the tears that well
- 72  
Everything belongs to the loveless—for the loving  
Bones too belong to others
- 73  
They call it the gift of love—the union  
Of breath and bone
- 74  
Love yields affection and that yields the boundless  
Glory of friendship
- 75  
They call it the fruit of loving—the glory awaiting  
Those joyful on earth
- 76  
It serves only virtue say those who don't know—but love  
Is friend to wrong too
- 77  
Like sun on a body writhing without bones  
Virtue scorches the loveless
- 78  
Like a withered tree in the desert sprouting leaves—living  
With no love in one's heart
- 79  
If a heart lacks the eye of love—what good  
Is the eye of a body
- 80  
Life endures by the ways of love—without it a body  
Is but skin and bones

## 9. HOSPITALITY

81

The life of cherishing and being at home—for cherishing guests  
With generosity

82

With a guest at the door it is not worth eating  
Even the nectar of the gods

83

The life that cherishes strangers each day  
Never falls upon ruin

84

Prosperity lives joyfully in the home that cherishes  
Each good guest with a smile

85

He who partakes with his guests—need he ever  
Plant seeds in the ground

86

Feeding the guests going and awaiting the guests coming—  
Guests to the gods above

87

We cannot foretell the good of offering—it rests  
On the nature of each guest

88

Those who don't dare to cherish their guests lament  
The loss of their labors

89

Want in plenty is what fools possess who foolishly  
Fail to cherish guests

90

Anicham flowers wilt when smelt—a guest wilts  
When a face turns sour



## 10. SWEET SPEECH

- 91  
Sweet speech—words mingled with love free of guile  
Spoken by those who know truth
- 92  
Speaking sweet words with a smile—better  
Than giving with joy
- 93  
Facing gently looking kindly speaking sweetly  
With one's heart—that is right action
- 94  
They do not know the hardship of hunger—those  
Who speak sweetly with all
- 95  
Humility and sweet speech adorn one in beauty—  
All else does not
- 96  
Good grows and wrong wanes if one who loves goodness  
Speaks sweetly
- 97  
They grant greatness and virtue—words that grant goodness  
Without ceasing to be sweet
- 98  
Sweet words without smallness bring happiness  
Here and hereafter
- 99  
Sweet words bring sweetness—seeing this why  
Does anyone speak harshly
- 100  
Speaking without sweetness sweet words within—like finding  
Ripe fruit and eating sour

## 11. GRATITUDE

- 101  
Hard even for heaven and earth to match—help given  
Without help gained
- 102  
Even if small help given in time—far  
Far larger than the world
- 103  
The weight of good done without weighing results—grace  
Greater than oceans
- 104  
Seen as a tree by those who can see—good done  
The size of a seed
- 105  
Help does not measure help—the heart of the helped  
Measures help
- 106  
Forget no bond with the blameless—renounce no friend  
Who held through hard times
- 107  
Remembered for all seven births—the friendship  
That ends affliction
- 108  
Forgetting good done is not good—forgetting at once  
What is not good—good
- 109  
Remembering one good that was done the worst  
Of wrongs disappears
- 110  
Kill goodness—redemption remains—kill gratitude—  
Redemption is gone

## 12. FAIRNESS

111

Fairness alone is goodness—if one attains  
Fairness with all

112

A fair man's wealth never falters—and offers  
Protection to his progeny

113

Renounce at once wealth gained without fairness  
Even if it brings only good

114

In seeing his children we know  
If a man is fair

115

Rising and falling have never not been—an unbiased heart  
Adorns wisdom

116

Know this—if I do wrong my heart failing At fairness  
I'm ruined

117

The decline of one balanced in goodness—the wise  
Do not deem it as ruin

118

Like a balance that weighs truly an impartial mind  
Adorns the wise

119

Fairness means speech without bias—when bias  
Is absent within

120

Good business for those who do business—caring  
For others' goods as one's own

### 13. SELF-CONTROL

121

Self-control sets one among gods—its lack  
Sets one in darkness

122

Safeguard composure like truth—no treasure  
Is greater for the living

123

On the path of wisdom achieving control  
Achieves glory and renown

124

Steady in one's state staying composed one stands  
Taller than a mountain

125

Humility is good for all—and great wealth  
For the wealthy

126

He who contains all five like a tortoise—safe  
Through all seven lives

127

Guard one's tongue if nothing else—unguarded  
One suffers how words slip

128

Good ceases to be good if one harms  
Even once with harsh words

129

A wound left by fire heals within—  
Not the scar left by words

130

Virtue awaits those who check anger learn deeply  
And remain composed

## 14. THE POSSESSION OF CONDUCT

- 131  
Conduct gives birth to greatness—guard conduct  
More even than life
- 132  
Guard conduct with unceasing care—one finds  
No better companion
- 133  
Conduct itself is nobility—a person  
Falls low by losing it
- 134  
A mantra may be relearned—a Brahmin destroying conduct  
Destroys his birth
- 135  
One has no glory with ill conduct—as one has  
No bounty with jealousy
- 136  
Knowing the anguish of its loss the strong  
Hold firmly to conduct
- 137  
The presence of conduct brings glory—its absence  
Damnation beyond measure
- 138  
Good conduct is seed to virtue—bad conduct yields  
Sorrow without end
- 139  
For those who have conduct wrong words do not slip  
From one's lips
- 140  
Those who can't flow with the world—even if learned  
They know nothing

## 15. FIDELITY

141

The folly of wanting another man's wife—not found  
In those who know virtue

142

Of those outside virtue no fool is greater than the one  
Outside another's door

143

They are more than dead—those wronging  
A trusting man's wife

144

The heedless man who enters another man's house—  
However great what good is he

145

Taking a man's wife thinking it easy gains shame  
That won't ever die

146

Enmity offense fear damnation—the man taking another's wife  
Has these forever

147

A man embodies virtue not wanting the virtue  
Of another man's wife

148

Not only virtue but fullness of conduct—the fortitude  
That won't seek another's wife

149

Who attains glory on this earth of fierce waters—he  
Who won't taste the arms of another's

150

Even doing evil and living without virtue a man does right  
Not seeking the virtue of another man's wife

## 16. FORBEARANCE

151

Like earth that bears digging those who bear scorn  
Stand highest

152

To bear transgression is always good—to forget it  
Better than good

153

Want in want—turning away guests—strength in strength—  
Bearing fools

154

If one seeks excellence without end protect  
And practice forbearance

155

Those who hit back—held as nothing—those who forbear—  
Cherished like gold

156

For those who hit back—one day of pleasure—for those who bear  
—  
A life of renown

157

Better to suffer wrong than to wrong  
Others who wrong you

158

To overpower arrogant insolence practice  
Inborn patience

159

Purer than saints—those who endure  
Vicious mouths

160

Those who endure without eating are great—after those  
Who endure harsh words

## 17. FREEDOM FROM ENVY

161

Take as the way of virtue—freedom  
From envy in one's heart

162

Gain that cannot be equaled—freedom  
From envy from any

163

The envious who won't honor it in others  
Forfeit the fruit of virtue

164

Knowing the misery of misconduct one  
Does no wrong out of envy

165

It alone is enough—even without enemies envy  
Eviscerates the envious

166

They perish without food without clothing—the family  
Of one jealous of giving

167

Fortune fed up with the envious consigns them  
To her wayward sister

168

Envy is a fiend—it ravages wealth and flings us  
Into the fire

169

Ponder whether the jealous heart has riches  
And the good one ruin

170

None grow great through envy—none  
Without it lack plenty



## 18. FREEDOM FROM GREED

171

He without fairness who covets good things falters  
And shatters his family

172

They do not do wrong wishing for gain—those  
Who shrink from bias

173

They do not do wrong coveting small pleasures—those  
Who seek another pleasure

174

They do not covet thinking they are poor—those who command  
Their senses and see

175

What good is great learning if the learned  
Do wrong out of greed

176

The thought of wrong ruins him—the seeker of grace  
Coveting others' things

177

They yield no greatness—shun riches  
Born out of greed

178

What keeps abundance abundant—not craving  
What other hands hold

179

Seeing their virtue fortune embraces  
Those free of all greed

180

Thoughtless greed brings ruin—the pride  
Of not needing brings triumph

## 19. FREEDOM FROM BACKBITING

181

Even speaking no goodness and doing evil—biting  
No backs is sweetness

182

Worse than cursing good and doing evil—biting another's back  
While smiling to their face

183

In place of living falsely biting backs—dying  
Confers the wealth of virtue

184

Even speaking evil before others speak nothing  
Behind them forgetting what follows

185

Vile and backbiting words betray hearts  
That speak no virtue

186

He who proclaims the faults of others will have  
His best faults proclaimed

187

They divide old friends with their words—those  
Who can't speak joyfully and make friends

188

Those who broadcast the faults of their friends—what  
Won't they do to strangers

189

The weight of backbiting men—does the earth  
Bear it for virtue

190

If one sees one's faults as one sees them in others  
What harm can come to one's soul

## 20. FREEDOM FROM FRUITLESS SPEECH

191

Those who speak without fruit angering many—  
Despised by all

192

Fruitless speech before many—worse  
Than heartlessness to friends

193

Fruitless speech spoken without end  
Tells the absence of goodness

194

Fruitless and denatured words in an assembly  
Destroy goodness and grace

195

If the good speak without fruit all wealth  
And glory leave them

196

He who celebrates words without fruit—not a son  
But the husk of a man

197

The wise may speak without goodness but it is good  
Never to speak without fruit

198

The wise who consider the highest fruit  
Will not speak one fruitless word

199

Those who see truth with clear eyes never lapse  
Into words without meaning

200

Speak speech that bears fruit—never speech  
That bears nothing

## 21. FEAR OF WRONGDOING

201

The excellent fear it—the evil do not—the confusion  
Of doing wrong

202

Wrong begets wrong—fear wrong  
Beyond fire

203

Chief of all knowing—not wronging  
Those who wrong us

204

Even when forgetful mean no harm—virtue means harm  
To those who mean harm

205

Do no wrong thinking you have nothing—if you do  
You will—again and again

206

If one wishes no misery inflict  
No evil on others

207

One may escape any foe—but wrong  
Relentless destroys in time

208

Like a shadow underfoot—the ruin  
Of wrongdoers

209

If one loves oneself do not think  
Even the least wrong

210

Know this—one knows no harm by doing  
No wrong and not straying

## 22. KNOWING WHAT IS FITTING

211

Kindness seeks no return—what does the earth  
Return to the rain

212

Wealth earned through effort—all for being generous  
To those whom it fits

213

Nothing better to have here or in heaven than  
Generosity that fits

214

They live who know kindness—all others are placed  
Among the dead

215

A well of abundant water—the wealth of the wise  
Who love the world

216

A tree bearing fruit at the heart of town—wealth  
In the hands of good people

217

A tree granting remedies freely to all—wealth  
In the hands of great people

218

Even in tight times they won't cease to be generous—those  
Who embody true kindness

219

Lacking a way to do what is fitting—that  
Is poverty to the good

220

If generosity yields ruin—ruin is worth having  
Even by selling oneself

## 23. GIVING

221

Giving to those with nothing is giving—all else  
Expects a return

222

Even leading to heaven taking is wrong—even leading to hell  
Giving is good

223

Giving and not crying I have nothing—found  
In those of good family

224

It is bitter to be begged—till the face  
That begged turns sweet

225

Strength of the strong—strength over hunger—after those  
Whose strength relieves hunger

226

Ending the ruinous hunger of the poor—a safe  
That stores a man's wealth

227

The vicious disease that is hunger cannot touch  
Those who share food

228

The callous who lose all that they keep—do they not know  
The joy of giving

229

More bitter than begging—balancing books by  
Eating alone

230

Nothing more bitter than death—but death is sweet  
If one cannot give

## 24. RENOWN

231

Give freely and gain glory—nothing else  
Gains a life more

232

The glory of those giving what's needed—those  
Who speak speak only of this

233

Nothing but peerless and soaring renown endures  
Undying in this world

234

When one gains lasting renown on earth the heavens  
Cease praising the saints

235

Gain in loss—life in death—the discerning alone  
Attain them

236

If you appear appear with renown—better not to appear  
Than to appear without it

237

Those with no renown not blaming themselves—why  
Do they blame them who scorn them

238

A stain on all people—living without  
Leaving a name

239

Even the blameless abundance of earth dwindles  
Beneath bodies without name

240

Who lives without name does not live—who lives  
Without blame lives

### **III RENUNCIATION**



## 25. COMPASSION

241

The wealth of compassion—wealth among wealth—the wealth of things—

Found also among fools

242

On the path of goodness achieve compassion—it alone

Sees one to the end of every path

243

One who knows compassion does not enter

The darkness of hell

244

Those with compassion who cherish all lives

Face nothing their life will fear

245

The fertile and windswept world stands witness—those

With compassion do not suffer

246

They lose everything but disdain—those who discard

Compassion and do wrong

247

No heaven without compassion—as no earth

Without wealth

248

Lacking possessions one may yet flourish—lacking compassion

One lacks for all time

249

Like truth beheld without wisdom—virtue performed

Without compassion

250

Before those weaker—think of oneself

Before those stronger

## 26. REFUSING MEAT

251

He who eats flesh to fatten his own—how  
Can he embody compassion

252

One commands no wealth without care—one commands  
No compassion eating flesh

253

Like hearts that bear weapons no grace in minds  
That relish others' flesh

254

Lack of compassion—killing not-killing—lack  
Of virtue—eating what's killed

255

Life lies in not eating meat—eat and the jaws  
Of hell clamp forever

256

None would seek to sell flesh if none sought  
To eat by killing

257

If they knew it as the wound of another  
People would not eat meat

258

They eat no flesh severed from life—those  
Who have severed confusion

259

Not taking and eating one life—better than  
A thousand offerings through fire

260

To those refusing to kill and eat meat all lives  
Join hands in prayer

261

To bear suffering and to do no harm—that  
Is the form of tavam

262

Those with tavam do tavam—those without it  
Perform it in vain

263

Wanting to give to those who've let go  
Did the others forget tavam

264

Enemies are ruined and friends raised up if the one  
Who has tavam thinks it

265

It brings what is sought as sought—perform  
Tavam in this life

266

Those who do tavam do their duty—caught in desire  
Others cause their own ruin

267

In burning and burning gold brightens—enduring  
Affliction brings light

268

Those whose lives aren't their own—revered  
By all other lives

269

Those who attain tavam's power find freedom  
From death at hand

270

Few do tavam—many do not—that is why  
Many have nothing

## 28. UNWORTHY CONDUCT

271

At the hollow conduct of a dishonest heart  
The five senses laugh within

272

Knowing wrong in one's heart what good  
To tower to the sky

273

A show of command in one without it—a cow in tiger's skin  
Munching crops

274

One who does wrong behind tavam—hunter  
Behind bushes catching birds

275

The false conduct of him who says he needs nothing  
Will make him cry out what have I done

276

None more cruel than those seeming to renounce  
And living by falsehood

277

Some seeming as regal as a red rosary pea  
Are as black at heart as its tip

278

Plunging into the waters of greatness many hide  
False conduct in their hearts

279

The crooked lyre is sweet—the straight arrow harsh—one  
Must know people by their deeds

280

If one keeps from what the wise call evil  
No need to shave or grow tangles

## 29. FREEDOM FROM STEALING

281

One wanting no shame—watch that one's heart  
Wishes to steal nothing

282

Even the thought is wrong—think not  
To thief another's things

283

Seeming to grow—gain gained by stealth  
Declines utterly

284

Desire grown thick in thievery—misery  
Without end in the end

285

For those set on things awaiting a lapse—no love  
Set on compassion

286

They cannot fit what fits—those with desire  
Grown thick in thievery

287

The darkness of stealing—unknown to those knowing  
The strength of grace

288

Like good in a heart that loves grace—deception  
In a heart that loves theft

289

They err and perish—those who know nothing  
But thieving

290

Heaven never shuns those who don't steal—life  
Always shuns those who do

### 30. TRUTH

291

What do we call truth—speech  
Free of all evil

292

If falsehood begets immaculate good it too  
Belongs with truth

293

Speak nothing the heart knows to be false—once spoken  
The heart scorches oneself

294

One lives in all wise hearts if one lives  
Without lies in one's heart

295

One stands above generosity and tavaṃ when  
One speaks truth with one's heart

296

It bestows all virtue without effort—nothing  
Brings glory like not lying

297

Not doing and not doing all other good is yet good  
If one masters not lying and not lying

298

Purity without comes by water—purity within  
Comes by being true

299

For the wise all lamps are not lamps—only the lamp  
Of not lying is lamp

300

In all that we see to be true nothing  
Is truer than truth

### 31. FREEDOM FROM ANGER

301

They guard who guard where anger has sway—where not  
Why guard or not guard

302

Anger is bad where it has no sway—where it has sway  
Nothing is worse

303

Bear anger toward none—anger gives birth  
To evil

304

Anger kills joy and laughter—is any  
Enemy greater

305

To guard oneself guard against anger—unguarded  
Anger destroys one

306

The fire of rage that kills all it touches burns  
The raft of one's teachers

307

As surely as the earth to the hand that hits it—the ruin  
Of those who take rage as power

308

Even when scorched by tongues of fire it is good  
To forgo anger

309

All one conceives comes into being if one bears  
No anger within

310

They are dead whose anger hasn't died—they are saints  
Who sail beyond anger

## 32. DOING NO HARM

311

Precept of the flawless—not harming others  
Even for wealth that brings glory

312

Precept of the flawless—not striking even them  
Who struck them in fury

313

To harm one who harmed one for nothing brings hardship  
Without hope of release

314

To punish wrongdoers ashame them with goodness  
And release them

315

What good is knowledge if one doesn't see the suffering  
Of another as one's own

316

What one has recognized to be harm  
One must not do to another

317

Highest of all—intending no evil toward anyone  
Anyway anywhere

318

Why would one harm the lives of others knowing  
What harms one's life

319

Harm done to others before noon returns  
Of its own by nightfall

320

Pain comes to those who pain others—those seeking  
No pain pain none



### 33. FREEDOM FROM KILLING

321

Right action is not killing—killing  
Brings all other wrongs

322

Of all that authors have gathered together—to share food  
And cherish life stands highest

323

Foremost of virtues—not killing—close  
Behind it—not lying

324

What is a good way—that which upholds  
Killing nothing

325

Those who dread bloodshed and practice not killing—highest  
Of those who dread stasis and let go

326

Life-ending death does not touch their days—those whose  
conduct  
Does not touch killing

327

Take not the sweet life of another—even  
If it takes one's life

328

Even if great and gained by virtue wealth gained by killing  
Does not suit the wise

329

Those who kill are wretched—know hearts  
That know what is base

330

Those living in misery and ill in body—they  
Took lives from bodies

### 34. IMPERMANENCE

331

The basest and least of all sense—seeing what won't last  
As what lasts

332

Great wealth arrives like a crowd to a show—and goes  
As the crowd itself goes

333

Wealth by nature does not endure—when gained  
Do what endures

334

What appears as a day—a blade  
Flaying life if one sees

335

Before the stiff tongue and final gasp—take up  
The good to be done

336

Here yesterday gone today—that  
Is the glory of this world

337

They think millions on millions of thoughts—those who  
Do not know they will live one moment

338

Like the bird departing its shell—the bond  
Between life and body

339

Death is like sleeping—birth  
Like waking from sleep

340

For the life sheltered in a body—is there no  
Home that lasts

### 35. RENUNCIATION

341

One who lets go of any thing and any thing is free  
Of the pain of that thing and that thing

342

Renounce in time if you seek—after you renounce  
All that delights is here

343

Seek to subdue the senses—seek to release  
All you seek through the senses

344

To hold nothing is the nature of tavam—holding  
Prevents and confuses

345

Why have other bonds—to sever from birth  
The body is more than enough

346

Who severs the pride of me and mine enters  
The world beyond gods

347

Those who seize seizing without ceasing—seized  
By trouble without ceasing

348

Those releasing completely touch heaven—all others  
Fall into snares

349

Severing seizing severs rebirth—otherwise  
Nothing can rest

350

Hold to the hold of one who holds nothing—to hold nothing  
Hold to that hold

### 36. KNOWING WHAT IS REAL

351

Delusion that takes what is not real for the real  
Leads to a birth without light

352

For those who depart from delusion—darkness  
Departs—glory arrives

353

For those who see truth—leaving delusion—heaven  
Is closer than earth

354

For those who cannot sense truth  
The senses yield nothing

355

Whatever thing whatever kind—perceiving  
Its truth is knowledge

356

Those who study and see truth here—reach  
The path beyond here

357

If a mind perceive and penetrate truth—no need  
To think of rebirth

358

Quelling birth's folly by seeing truth's splendor—  
That is knowledge

359

If one severs all bonds knowing what bears one  
The suffering that binds unbinds

360

Confusion anger craving—as their names disappear  
Affliction disappears

### 37. SEVERING FROM DESIRE

361

The seed of incessant birth for all lives  
At all times—desire

362

Desire no birth when desiring—it comes  
Desiring no desire

363

Here no greater wealth than freedom from desire—nor anything  
There to equal it

364

Purity is absence of desire—it comes  
By seeking what is true

365

Those beyond desire are beyond—the rest  
Only seem to be beyond

366

Desire itself betrays—fearing desire  
Itself is virtue

367

Undying deeds happen as hoped if one severs  
Desire completely

368

Those without desire do not suffer—those with it  
Suffer without ceasing

369

If one ends desire—misery of miseries—even on earth  
Unending joy

370

Releasing insatiable desire one finds in that moment  
Glory that never ends

## **IV FATE**

371

Fate that bears wealth bears energy—fate  
That takes bears debility

372

Fate that ruins brings folly—fate that creates  
Broadens knowledge

373

Even studying deep books—one's  
Innate knowledge prevails

374

One thing to gain wealth—another to gain wisdom—  
The nature of the world is two

375

When gaining all bad becomes good—when losing  
All good becomes bad

376

However cast off what is fated won't go—however  
Secured what is not won't stay

377

Unless fate decrees it one doesn't enjoy  
Even many millions amassed

378

Those without would go without if only the suffering  
Alloted them would pass

379

Why do they howl when things turn sour—those  
Who call it good when things turn good

380

It exceeds every evasion—what  
Is more powerful than fate

PART TWO

# WEALTH

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# **I SOVEREIGNTY**

### 39. THE SPLENDOR OF KINGS

381

Castle kingdom force abundance advisors friends—the one  
With these six stands highest

382

Generosity fearlessness knowledge energy—the nature of a king  
Is these four in fullness

383

Tireless learned bold—one ruling a land  
Must be these without ceasing

384

Unerring in virtue unyielding to evil unerring  
In honor—that is a king

385

Strength that makes and earns and saves and assigns  
What is saved—that is a king

386

Praised by the land—the king easy to approach  
Free of all harsh words

387

The world abides in the word of one who cares  
And gives with kind words

388

Counted a god among men—the king who protects  
And carries out justice

389

The world abides beneath his umbrella—the king  
Who bears bitter words

390

Generosity justice kindness vigilance—one with these four  
A light for all kings

## 40. LEARNING

391

Faultlessly study what is to be studied—then fit  
All that you've studied

392

The two called numbers and letters—eyes  
For lives with life

393

The learned have eyes—the unlearned  
Two wounds in their face

394

The work of the wise—delight on meeting  
And feeling on leaving

395

Like the poor before the rich the learned bow low—those  
Who won't learn are least

396

To the depth a person digs a well fills—to the depth  
A person learns a mind deepens

397

It makes all places one's home and country—why wouldn't  
A man learn till he dies

398

The learning one learns in one life—safeguard  
Through all seven lives

399

When the world takes delight in what delights the learned  
The learned grow in their love

400

Learning is sacred unperishing prosperity—all  
Other wealth is not wealth

## 41. LACK OF LEARNING

401

Addressing the wise without knowing books—like playing  
At chess with no board

402

Like a woman without breasts loving womanhood—a man  
Without learning loving words

403

If they keep quiet before the learned even those  
Without learning are great

404

Even if the unlearned shine for a moment  
The wise do not call it wisdom

405

As the learned engage him the pride of a man  
Without learning falls

406

Like salt-ridden soil that yields nothing—the unlearned  
Exist—nothing more

407

An excellent doll made of mud—the beauty of a man  
With no great knowledge

408

More bitter than the good meeting poverty—those  
Without learning meeting wealth

409

Even if born high the unlearned cannot reach the greatness  
Of the learned born low

410

As animals to men—men to those learned in books  
That give light

## 42. LISTENING

411

Riches of the ear—riches among riches—highest  
Of all other riches

412

When the ear lacks food feed a little  
To the belly

413

Those on earth fed through their ear—like gods  
Fed through their fire

414

Even if one lacks learning listen—it holds one up  
When weary

415

Words given voice by the virtuous—staff  
To keep one from slipping

416

Listen to what is good however little—that little  
Can grant great renown

417

Those who listen deeply do not speak stupidities  
Even by mistake

418

If the art of listening hasn't entered them—even when hearing  
Ears do not hear

419

Unless one has heard the wise fully—hard  
For a mouth to be humble

420

The wretched who savor mouths and not ears—  
What difference if they live or die

### 43. THE POSSESSION OF KNOWLEDGE

421

Knowledge—tool that guards against ruin  
And fortress that falls to no enemy

422

Knowledge keeps the mind steady and leads  
From evil to goodness

423

Whatever one hears from whoever's mouth—discerning  
Its truth is knowledge

424

Delivering the complex simply and discerning  
What others say—that is knowledge

425

Befriending the wise is brilliance—and not blooming  
And then drooping is wisdom

426

Moving with the great however the great move—  
That is knowledge

427

Those who have knowledge foresee—those  
Who do not do not

428

The work of knowing is fearing what's fearful—not fearing  
What's fearful is folly

429

No sorrow can come to shake them—the wise  
Who watch for what comes

430

Those with knowledge have all—those without it  
Having all have nothing

## 44. ELIMINATION OF FAULTS

431

Those free of anger pride and depravity  
Attain wealth with glory

432

Avarice arrogance exuberance without greatness—these  
Are calamities for a king

433

For those who shun vice even one seed  
Of wrong is a tree

434

Faults are foes that bring ruin—guard as treasure  
Freedom from faults

435

The life of a king who won't guard beforehand  
Falls like a haystack before fire

436

Discarding his faults and discerning those in others  
What fault can any king have

437

The wealth of misers who won't do their duty  
Withers declines and rots

438

Avarice that grips from within—vice  
Unlike any other

439

Never acclaim oneself—nor desire  
What doesn't produce good

440

If one loves what one loves in secret—the designs  
Of foes fall to pieces

## 45. GAINING THE HELP OF THE GREAT

441

Those mature in knowledge and virtue—study  
And gain their friendship

442

Befriend and cherish those able to end  
And avert suffering

443

Rarest of rarities—cherishing the great  
As one's own

444

Moving with those greater as one's own—highest  
Of all great strengths

445

Counselors are eyes—a king must consider  
And choose well

446

To one strong in right company and conduct  
Enemies can do nothing

447

Who can ruin the king who rules counsel  
Prepared to thunder

448

An unguarded king without counsel that thunders falls  
Even without enemies

449

No profit without principal—nor permanence  
Without pillars of support

450

Renouncing wise friends—ten times worse  
Than earning foes



## 46. FREEDOM FROM SMALLNESS

451

Greatness fears smallness of company—the small  
Consider it great company

452

The nature of earth alters water—the nature  
Of company alters what we know

453

One's mind yields knowledge—one's company  
Tells who one is

454

Knowledge appears of the mind but comes  
Of the company we keep

455

Purity of mind and deed—both rest  
On purity of company

456

Purity of mind bestows goodness—purity of company—  
Nothing that fails

457

Virtuous minds bring wealth to all life—virtuous company—  
All glory

458

Even for the wise with virtuous minds  
Virtuous company is safety

459

A virtuous mind yields a good birth—and virtuous company  
Protects it

460

No greater aid than good company—no  
Greater torment than bad

## 47. CLARITY BEFORE ACTION

461

Consider what is spent what made and what gained—  
Then act

462

No deed is impossible for those with clear counsel  
Who then think choose and act

463

Deeds that deplete possibility for gain—the wise  
Do not even begin them

464

Those that dread the error of dishonor  
Begin nothing without clarity

465

How to plant your own patch of enemies—rise up  
Without knowing what's what

466

Doing what is unworthy ruins—not doing  
What is worthy also ruins

467

Ponder and proceed—proceeding and then saying  
We'll ponder is folly

468

Without right effort all effort miscarries  
Even with many who care

469

Enacted without knowing the character of all actors  
Even right action contains error

470

The world won't credit what doesn't credit a king—think  
And act beyond reproach

## 48. KNOWING STRENGTH

471

Assess a deed's power one's power opponents' power and the  
power  
Of one's friends—then act

472

For those who stand firm in knowledge and possibility  
No deed is undoable

473

Many have fallen midway—moving to move  
Not knowing their strength

474

Failing to fit others ignoring his limits and flaunting  
Himself a king falls quickly

475

Even the axle of a cart of feathers breaks  
If heaped with too many

476

If one at the end of a branch keeps climbing  
His life is over

477

Give rightly knowing one's limits—that is how  
One honors and guards wealth

478

No harm when earning recedes if spending  
Does not exceed it

479

A life that won't live within limits appears full  
Then falls completely

480

Generosity that doesn't know what one has  
Destroys what one has

## 49. KNOWING TIME

481

During the day the crow conquers the owl—kings  
That conquer foes need time

482

Conduct that meets time—rope  
That holds wealth together

483

With right means and right time is anything  
Impossible

484

Seeking the time and place one seeking  
The world can have it

485

They seek the right time unperturbed—those  
Who seek the world

486

Like a ram retreating to attack—the restraint  
Of a king with strength

487

Brilliance without rushing holds anger  
Within—biding time

488

Bow before enemies till seeing their end—then—  
See their heads low

489

When the rare moment arrives do what is rare  
Without waiting

490

Wait like the crane that waits—and strike like the crane  
When right

## 50. KNOWING PLACE

491

Till seeing where something may be routed  
Scorn none—begin nothing

492

Even to the fierce able to face foes a fortress  
Confers many gains

493

Knowing the place—protecting among opponents—  
Even the powerless overpower

494

If friends act in force knowing the place  
Opponents lose heart opposing

495

In deep waters a crocodile conquers—beyond them  
Others conquer it

496

A strong-wheeled chariot cannot cross seas—nor a  
Sea-crossing ship cross land

497

If one omits nothing and acts with the place  
Courage alone will serve

498

If a leader of large armies enters a small place  
His greatness crumbles

499

Hard to take people rooted in their land even if  
They lack force and fortress

500

The elephant that has faced many foes without fear—defeated  
In mire by a fox

## 51. KNOWING AND TRUSTING

501

Virtue wealth pleasure awe—discerning these four  
In depth a king chooses

502

Born well free of faults unwilling to risk shame—  
That's where trust belongs

503

Rare to find one free of all ignorance even  
With rare learning and faultless

504

Know character know faults know which is greater—then  
Take what is greatest

505

One's deeds alone—touchstone of greatness  
Or smallness

506

Trust no one without ties—holding to nothing  
They shun no wrong

507

It brings all folly—fond trust in any  
Who lack knowledge

508

One who trusts others without trial—trouble  
For generations on end

509

Trust no one untried—once tried entrust  
With what one entrusts

510

Trust without trial—doubt of one tried—both  
Yield trouble without end

## 52. KNOWING AND ENGAGING

511

One perceiving right and wrong whose nature  
Seeks right—worthy to engage

512

One who fosters fecundity increases increase and studies  
What hinders—engage

513

Clarity knowledge love the absence of greed—trust  
Those filled with these four

514

Though tested in all ways many  
Prove otherwise in action

515

Engage no one dear to one's heart unless they know  
And endure action

516

Discern the doer discern the deed determine  
The time and have done

517

This by this man and these means—in seeing it  
Leave it to him

518

Having discerned who is fit for which deed let them  
Make it their own

519

Fortune flees those taking amiss one freely  
And fully in action

520

King—discern daily—when doers don't swerve  
The world doesn't swerve

### 53. KINDNESS TO KINDRED

521

Even when one has nothing—kin celebrate  
Ties over time

522

If one has kin of affection that endures one finds  
Wealth that flourishes

523

Living without moving with family—like filling  
A lake with no banks

524

Fruit that one gains in gaining wealth—family  
Flowing freely on all sides

525

One who commands generosity and sweet words finds family  
Upon family on all sides

526

The greatly generous who nurse no anger—  
No better kin in the vast world

527

Crows conceal nothing and call and eat—those  
Who are like them know wealth

528

That king who sees eminence not sameness—many  
Thrive in his sight

529

When the cause for leaving has left—kinship  
Returns of its own

530

A king should study reflect and welcome  
Those who return for good cause



## 54. ABSENCE OF MIND

531

Worse even than unrestrained anger—neglect  
From too much rejoicing

532

Absence of mind kills renown—as having  
To fill daily kills knowledge

533

All the world's authors agree—no name  
Without presence of mind

534

No stronghold for one who has fear—no refuge  
With absence of mind

535

Those who fail to protect beforehand  
Grieve the error after

536

If one never falls into failings with anyone  
At any point—that is peerless

537

If one guards action with presence of mind there is nothing  
That is not possible

538

What is honored do—even seven births  
Cannot atone for not doing

539

If swelling with satisfaction remember  
The forgetful who fell

540

One easily enacts one's thoughts  
If one keeps thinking

## 55. GOOD RULE

541

Regal with all reflecting clear-eyed and doing  
What is right—that is the way of justice

542

The world looks to the sky for life—as people  
To the justice of a king

543

Virtue and the books of priests—both rest  
On the rule of kings

544

The world embraces the feet of great kings whose rule  
Embraces their people

545

Where kings rule as wisdom decrees  
Rain and harvest abound

546

Not the king's spear but his rule grants victory—if  
His rule does not bend

547

The king protects the world and justice protects the king—if  
The king doesn't impede it

548

The king who sees no one and rectifies nothing  
Sinks and ruins himself

549

Not a taint on a king but his task—correcting the people  
He loves and protects

550

Like one weeding a crop as it grows—the king who punishes  
Iniquity with death

## 56. HARSH RULE

551

Kings who torment accustomed to wrong—far  
More cruel than killers

552

Like demanding with a spear—begging  
With scepter in hand

553

The king who fails to do justice each day—each day  
His country falls

554

He loses prosperity and people alike—the king  
Without thought whose rule bends

555

The tears of the hopeless—force  
That scrapes away riches

556

What lasts is good rule—without it  
A king has no light

557

How is earth without rainfall—that's life  
Without mercy in one's king

558

Beneath the rule of a king without justice  
Having is worse than not having

559

When kings veer from justice—monsoons veer  
From spilling their rains

560

Cows cease giving and the learned forget books  
When guardians fail to guard

## 57. STRIKING NO FEAR

561

Discerning what is fitting and correcting  
Completely—that is a king

562

For abundance to abound wield fiercely  
And discharge gently

563

A tyrant feared for his deeds falls quickly  
Without fail

564

If bitter words call him cruel a king crumbles  
And falls quickly

565

A ghost seems to hold his riches—the mean-faced king  
Whom no one can see

566

If one lacks eyes and speaks harshly—endless wealth  
Ends in an instant

567

Harsh words and undue punishments—rasp  
That erodes a king's mettle

568

If kings who spurn thought and counsel condemn  
In anger—their fortunes decline

569

In battle he falls in the heat of terror—the king  
Who creates no safety

570

Harsh rule that brings idiots together—nothing  
Burdens the earth more

## 58. EYES THAT ARE MOVED

571

The astonishing beauty of eyes that are moved—because  
It exists this world exists

572

The world has being because eyes are moved—without it  
Men burden the earth

573

What good is a song that cannot be sung—what good is an eye  
That cannot be moved

574

Beyond appearing in a face what good is an eye  
If it cannot be moved in measure

575

Being moved adorns eyes—otherwise  
They are nothing but sores

576

Like trees that are stuck in the ground—those stuck with eyes  
That cannot be moved

577

Without eyes that are moved a person lacks eyes—with eyes  
One never lacks movement

578

The virtuous king whose eyes can be moved—  
This world belongs to him

579

Eyes moved to patience in those able to punish—  
Nothing stands higher

580

Even seeing the poured poison they drink—those seeking  
The kindness all seek

## 59. ESPIONAGE

581

Spies and books of conscience—know these  
As a king's two eyes

582

Knowing all that goes on in all moments for all—that  
Is the work of a king

583

The king without spies not seeing what's true—nothing  
Keeps him supreme

584

Studying those acting and those near and those far—that  
Is spying

585

Appearing beyond doubt fearing no eye  
Spilling nothing—that is a spy

586

Able to cross as an ascetic learn and yield  
To nothing—that is a spy

587

Hearing what's hidden and knowing  
Past doubt—that is a spy

588

Take what a spy spies through the spying  
Of another spy

589

Where three spies agree lies clarity—procure  
They don't know who's who

590

Honor no spy in the open—honoring  
Brings out what's hidden

## 60. HAVING ENERGY

591

One who has has energy—without it  
What does one have

592

Having is having volition—the having  
Of things never lasts

593

They never lament they've lost wealth—those  
Who have energy at hand

594

To those with unwavering energy—wealth  
Asks the way and arrives

595

To the depth of the water the root of the lotus—to the height  
Of one's energy one's height

596

Let thought aspire to the heights—even  
Unachieved it achieves

597

Even stung by arrows the elephant stands tall—even stung  
By failure the sturdy do not slacken

598

One without energy never gains it—the glory  
Of giving to the world

599

Even the elephant immense and sharp-tusked  
Fears the tiger's attack

600

Strength within is strength overflowing—those  
Without it are trees not men

## 61. FREEDOM FROM SLOTH

601

The undying light of one's family disappears  
If sloth overtakes the flame

602

One who wants family to rise as family  
Proceeds by slothing sloth

603

His family precedes him in falling—the fool  
With sloth within

604

Their faults increase—their families fall—those fallen  
To sloth failing to strive

605

Prolonging forgetting idling sleeping—vessel  
Cherished by the falling

606

Even with land that lavishes wealth the idle  
Attain nothing great

607

They'll hear scorn and thunder—those failing  
To strive loving sloth

608

One soon turns slave to one's enemies if sloth  
Inhabits one's family

609

If one evades sloth's rule the faults ruling  
One's family are finished

610

The king free of sloth gains everything measured  
By him who measured the worlds



## 62. MASTERY OF ACTION

611

Effort yields greatness—never droop thinking  
Something is hard

612

Do not fail to do when doing—the world stays with those  
Who stay to the end

613

Generosity's glory abides in the excellent  
Command of energy

614

Generosity fails in men without energy like swords  
In the hands of softlings

615

One who seeks action not pleasure—a pillar  
Who frees family from suffering

616

Effort creates wealth—lack of effort  
Installs lack

617

Misfortune lodges in sloth—fortune  
Upon her flower in energy

618

Having no luck is no shame—having knowledge  
Without action is shame

619

Even if fate adds nothing effort  
Pays the body's labor

620

Those who strive without ceasing or despair  
See the defeat of fate

### 63. NOT BEING DEFEATED BY ADVERSITY

621

Smile at adversity—nothing  
Triumphs more fully

622

When the wise look within—the flood  
Of adversity vanishes

623

Those untroubled by trouble give  
Trouble to trouble

624

Besetting those like an ox on rough ground  
Affliction gains affliction

625

Besetting those untroubled by its waves  
Affliction afflicts affliction

626

Those who don't grasp and say it's all ours—do they suffer  
And say we have nothing

627

The wise knowing woes will target the body  
Take no distress as affliction

628

One suffers no suffering not longing for pleasure  
And knowing that pain is natural

629

Not seeking pleasure in pleasure one finds  
No suffering in suffering

630

Those who take pain as pleasure find prominence  
Honored by enemies

## **II THE ARMS OF GOVERNMENT**

## 64. MINISTERS

631

Great in means in method in timing and in action—  
That is a minister

632

Greatness in these five—courage learning wisdom protection  
Perseverance—that is a minister

633

Able to divide reunite cherish and keep—  
That is a minister

634

Able to discern to act from discernment and to speak  
Resolutely—that is a minister

635

One that knows right action sees what is possible and speaks  
The fullest words—that is a worthy advisor

636

Before a learned and subtle mind  
What subtlety can last

637

Even one who knows action must act knowing  
The nature of the world

638

Though a king without knowledge kills knowledge those  
Beside him must speak true

639

A million million enemies—better than a minister  
Plotting wrong at one's side

640

Even planning perfectly ministers without mastery  
Complete nothing

## 65. STRENGTH IN SPEECH

641

Excellence of the tongue is excellence—an excellence  
Beyond all other excellence

642

They yield prosperity or ruin—watch  
For weakness in one's words

643

To bind those listening and attract those  
Not listening—that is speech

644

No victory or virtue is higher—know qualities  
And speak

645

Speak knowing no speech can better  
What you speak

646

Growing love by one's words—gaining good from others' words—  
principle  
Of untarnished greatness

647

A mindful fearless master of words—hard  
For anyone to overcome

648

When one attains sweetness and order in words—the world  
Rushes to listen

649

Those who can't speak a few faultless words  
Love to speak many words

650

Those who cannot convey learning—a cluster  
Of flowers with no fragrance

## 66. PURITY OF ACTION

651

True allies impart wealth—true action—  
All that one needs

652

Shun always all action that bears  
No goodness or name

653

Steer clear of all deeds that dim light—you  
Who would keep becoming

654

Those steady in vision do nothing disgraceful  
Even in difficult times

655

Do nothing to regret—but if you do  
Do not regret it

656

Though you watch your own mother starve  
Do nothing the wise condemn

657

The greatest destitution of the wise—far above  
All wealth gained by wrong

658

Those who spurn the spurning of deeds—even  
Succeeding they suffer

659

What comes by tears goes by tears—even in loss  
Goodness yields fruit in time

660

Like filling an unfired pot with water—protecting  
With ill-gotten wealth

## 67. FIRMNESS OF ACTION

661

Firmness of action is firmness of mind—  
All else is else

662

The way of the wise—desisting from trouble  
And losing no heart in trouble

663

Mastery reveals what is finished—revealing  
In the middle brings misery

664

Saying—easy for anyone—doing  
As said—hard

665

Firmness of action in those of great vision reaches the king  
And inspires the whole

666

When those planning are steadfast  
Plans happen as planned

667

Scorn none by size—there are some like the pin  
In a great cart's wheel

668

Enact without waiting or wavering  
Each action seen clearly

669

Even in toil enact boldly all action  
That ends in joy

670

Those who don't prize firmness of action even when firm  
Will never be prized

## 68. WAYS OF ACTION

671

Resolve is the end of debate—bad  
To let resolve languish

672

Delay what is meant for delay—delay nothing  
Not meant for delay

673

When possible it is good to act—when not  
Seek possibility and act

674

On reflection we see the remnants of actions and enemies  
Scorch like remnants of fire

675

Bring these five out of darkness and act—  
Tools time place means deed

676

Effort impediments greatness of what's gained—study  
These first then act

677

Know the mind that knows it completely—that is how  
To complete an action

678

Completing one action with another—like binding  
A bull elephant with another

679

More pressing than favors to friends—drawing  
The sideless to one's side

680

Those of small places aware of what shakes them  
When gainful yield to the great



## 69. DIPLOMACY

681

Born to good lineage—full of love—possessing qualities  
A king loves—that is a diplomat

682

These three an ambassador cannot do without—love  
Knowledge strength in speaking true

683

Scholars among scholars—those whose words  
Conquer among conquerors

684

Wisdom appearance profound learning—send into action  
Those rich in these three

685

One of lucid speech who brings delight shuns dross  
And yields good—that is a diplomat

686

Fearless learned able to convey perceiving  
Each moment—that is a diplomat

687

Highest of all—those who consider place and time  
And speak what is needed

688

A true envoy is true in these three—courage  
Loyalty purity of heart

689

The fearless whose words never falter—they  
Can carry the word of the king

690

Even facing death a diplomat remains fearless  
Facing what's best for his king

## 70. MOVING WITH KINGS

691

With irascible kings move like one who warms  
By a fire—neither close nor far

692

In not seeking what is sought by kings one gains  
Enduring wealth from kings

693

Guard against misdeeds if one guards—suspected  
It is hard to come clean

694

In the presence of royalty desist from whispers  
And shared smiles

695

Ask nothing eavesdrop on nothing but listen  
When what's hidden is shared

696

Take note wait and without displeasure say pleasingly  
What wants to be said

697

Speak what is gainful never what is not  
Even when asked

698

Never slight the king's youth or kin—move  
With the light that's here

699

They do nothing disfavored thinking they're favored—those  
Whose wisdom won't waver

700

Liberty that enacts unkindness thinking  
Of old friendship brings ruin

## 71. READING FACES

701

A jewel on the earth of undying seas—he  
Who sees and notes the unsaid

702

Those who discern the heart without doubt deem  
Equal to the gods

703

Those who see behind faces—give anything  
To make them your own

704

Though his body looks the same he is different—he  
Who notes the unsaid

705

He who can't see behind faces—of his organs  
What good are his eyes

706

A crystal reflects its neighbor—as a face  
The fullness of one's heart

707

What is more wise than a face—it puts forth  
Rage and wonder

708

If one should find those who can see within  
It is enough to face them

709

If one finds those who know the eye's ways  
Eyes speak friendship and hostility

710

Measure of those who claim wisdom—none other  
To see than their eyes

## 72. KNOWING AN AUDIENCE

711

You who are lucid and know words—know and address  
Your audience with care

712

Know the occasion and speak with clarity—you  
Who are wise and know words

713

They know neither words nor strength—those speaking  
Ignorant of audience

714

Be brilliant before brilliance—and as simple  
As chalk before simplicity

715

Greatest of great qualities—restraint that won't speak  
Too early among the wise

716

Like falling from grace—slipping before people  
Of deep knowledge

717

Among those able to discern faultless words the learning  
Of the learned brings light

718

Like watering a plot where plants thrive—speaking  
Before those who sense deeply

719

You who speak well before the wise—do not lapse  
Into speech before the little

720

Pouring forth before those who aren't peers—like spilling  
Ambrosia in the yard

### 73. NOT FEARING AN AUDIENCE

721

They never falter before a great audience—the lucid  
Who know ways and words

722

Learned among the learned—those who convey learning  
To the learned

723

Many die bravely on the battlefield—few  
Stand fearless before an audience

724

Convey one's learning to the learned and attain  
What's greater from those greater

725

To answer an audience without fear—know and master  
The art of argument

726

What good is a sword for cowards—and what good  
A book for those fearful of wise listeners

727

Like a softling's bright sword on the battlefield—the learning  
Of one fearing an audience

728

Although they have studied they are fruitless—those who do not  
Speak well before the wise

729

Worse than those who haven't learned—those who have learned  
But fear wise assemblies

730

Though here they are gone—those fearful of the hall  
Unable to convey learning

## 74. COUNTRY

731

The union of unfailing yields untarnished wealth and people  
Of wisdom—that is a country

732

Great flourishing without ruin with wealth worthy  
Of desire—that is a country

733

Able to bear every burden as it comes giving all  
The king's due—that is a country

734

Harmony completely free of great hunger deadly enemies  
And endless disease—that is a country

735

Absence of factions king-vexing outlaws and crippling  
Inner enemies—that is a country

736

Country unknown to ruin with bounty that never shrinks  
Even in ruin—best of all countries

737

A country's limbs—flowing water fertile mountains ground water  
Surface water and safety

738

Wealth safety harvest happiness freedom from disease—these  
Are a country's beauty

739

Countries that thrive with toil are not countries—countries that  
thrive  
Without toil—countries

740

Even if everything fits it's no use if a king  
Does not fit his country

## 75. FORTRESSES

741

Even for the mighty a fortress is fortune—and fortune  
For those fearing attack

742

Possessed of shining water land hills and forests  
Of stunning shade—that is a fortress

743

Height width strength invincibility—these four together  
Authorities call safety

744

Large in size with little to defend able to defeat  
The ardor of enemies—that is a fortress

745

Hard to assail stocked up with food and easy  
To hold within—that is a fortress

746

Provisioned with all things and warriors  
At all points—that is safety

747

Hard to besiege storm or take by deceit—  
That is a fortress

748

Where those who hold it hold off the highest  
Of sieges—that is a fortress

749

Able to grant victory and glory at the outset  
Of battle—that is a fortress

750

Even with every greatness without men of great action  
A fortress is nothing

## 76. THE MAKING OF WEALTH

751

There is no other wealth than wealth to make  
The worthless worthy

752

Those with nothing are scorned by all—those with wealth  
Are honored

753

It conquers the darkness everywhere it goes—  
The unfailing light of wealth

754

It grants both virtue and pleasure—wealth  
Gained aright without harm

755

Shun absolutely the making of wealth that comes  
Without mercy or love

756

The king's wealth—wealth levied wealth claimed  
And wealth seized from enemies

757

Because wealth is its nurse mercy the babe  
Born of love can thrive

758

Like watching elephants fighting from a hill—  
Acting with wealth growing at hand

759

Make wealth—no blade severs more sharply  
An enemy's pride

760

For one who is solid in wealth that shines  
The other two come easy



## 77. THE SPLENDOR OF ARMIES

761

The king's highest holding—an army that conquers  
Full of all force fearless of wounds

762

Except in an army of long lineage hard to find courage  
That fears no danger or loss

763

So what if rats roar like the sea—with one hiss  
Of a snake they're gone

764

Courage without defeat or corruption carried  
Through time—that is an army

765

Force that gathers and fights though death rages  
Upon it—that is an army

766

Courage nobility tradition assurance—these  
Are an army's armor

767

Advancing fully in force withstanding  
Advances—that is an army

768

Even unable to defeat or defend by its bearing  
An army bears glory

769

Free of smallness lack and ceaseless aversion  
An army prevails

770

Even with countless warriors—without captains  
An army is nothing

## 78. THE VALOR OF WARRIORS

771

Scores that stood before him stand as stone—enemies  
Stand not before my lord

772

Far sweeter bearing the spear that missed an elephant  
Than the arrow that hit a forest hare

773

Valor it is said is ruthless—but nobility  
Among the fallen is its edge

774

Routing an elephant with his spear he laughs  
Pulling another from his body

775

If the fierce eyes of a warrior blink at a flying spear  
His heart has already fled

776

In counting one's days every day without  
Battle wounds means nothing

777

For those who seek fame not life the band  
Of a warrior grants beauty

778

Warriors that do not fear death do not shrink  
Even if a king rages

779

Heroes who die upholding their vows—who  
Can call them little

780

Death is worth begging for if dying  
Brings tears to a king's eyes

## 79. FRIENDSHIP

781

What is rarer than friendship—or greater  
Protection against foes

782

Friendship with wise souls—a moon waxing—fellowship  
With fools—a moon waning

783

Like relishing and relishing good books—relating  
And relating to the wise

784

Not for laughter the making of friends but thunder  
When going too far

785

Not presence not birth but feeling  
Grants friendship its right

786

Friendship is not a face smiling—friendship  
Is a heart that smiles

787

Friendship averts trouble shows the way and when  
Trouble comes stays

788

Like hands that check a garment as it slips—friendship  
Ends trouble in time

789

What is the throne of friendship—unwavering  
Support in all ways

790

He is this to me—I am this to him—even  
Saying this shrinks friendship

## 80. EXAMINED FRIENDSHIP

791

No greater ruin than thoughtless friendship—befriended  
Friends cannot flee

792

Bonds made without thought upon thought  
Bring mortal torment in the end

793

Consider character family errors and undying  
Relations—then befriend

794

Those of good family who fear wrongdoing—befriend  
Even by giving

795

Find and befriend them—those able to scorn wrong  
Bring tears and set right

796

It measures one's friends—even torment  
Contains merit

797

This is called profit to a man—avoiding  
The friendship of fools

798

Befriend no one who flees in misfortune—take nothing  
To heart that shrinks heart

799

The bond abandoned in adversity—even  
At death it burns

800

Cherish friendship with the faultless and even with gifts  
Renounce the unfit

## 81. LONG FRIENDSHIP

801

What is long friendship—friendship  
That hinders no liberty

802

Liberties are the limbs of friendship—and to savor them  
The duty of wisdom

803

If one cannot take the liberties friends take  
What good is any long friendship

804

The liberties friends take without asking—the great  
Take them with pleasure

805

Take it as folly or great liberty  
If a friend offends

806

Even in injury friends in friendship reject no friendship  
Faithful over time

807

Even when wronged those who love friends  
Do not cease to love

808

It is a great day when a friend does wrong for those free  
Not to hear a friend's wrongs

809

The wise love the friend who abandons no friendship  
Enduring intact over time

810

Those true to friendship over time—even those  
Who don't love them love them

## 82. HARMFUL FRIENDSHIP

811

With friends who lack goodness but seem essential it is better  
Bonds shrink than grow

812

Friends who fit nothing friendly in fortune fleeting in famine—so  
what  
If one gains or loses them

813

Friendship that weighs gain—equal to thieves  
And lovers for pay

814

Better to be alone than have friends who buckle  
Like colts in battle

815

The paltry friend who offers no help—better  
Not to have than to have

816

The ill will of the wise—a billion times better than  
The grasping friendship of a fool

817

The gain of enmity—ten billion times greater than  
The friendship of mere fun

818

With those insisting the possible is impossible  
Let friendship slip silently away

819

Friends whose words and deeds never meet—bitter  
Even in dreams

820

With those friendly at home but harsh in public—shun  
The tiniest proximity

### 83. FALSE FRIENDSHIP

821

Friendship with false men—anvil  
Waiting to be struck

822

Like women of two minds—bonds of kinship  
Without kinship

823

Even studying many noble books the ignoble  
Do not become noble

824

False men with sweet faces and hearts  
That scowl—fear them

825

Those whose hearts do not meet ours—nothing  
They say can be trusted

826

One knows quickly the words of foes though they speak  
Good things like friends

827

The bow bowing betrays evil—heed not  
An enemy's bowing words

828

The tears of foes—like hands in prayer  
Hiding knives

829

Kill it within delighting without—friendship  
With scorners who feign love

830

When foes act like friends be friendly  
In face not heart

831

What to call folly—discarding what helps  
And keeping what hurts

832

Folly of follies—to love deeds unfit  
For one's hands

833

Absence of shame affection attention or care for anything—  
That is the work of folly

834

No greater fool than he who studies knows and advises  
Without governing himself

835

The hell for seven lives of wrong—a fool  
Attains it in one

836

Failure and fetters when a fool without skill  
Attempts action

837

Strangers feast and relations starve if a fool  
Should chance on fortune

838

Like madmen getting drunk—a fool getting  
Anything in his hands

839

At parting no pain—how lovely  
The friendship of fools

840

The fool entering wise company—like going to bed  
With one's backside unwashed



## 85. PRESUMPTION

841

Want in want is want of knowledge—for wisdom  
No other want is want

842

If fools give happily it is the tavam  
Of those receiving

843

Afflictions afflicted by fools on themselves—hard even  
For enemies to equal

844

What to call ignorance—the arrogance  
That says we know

845

Learning without faults falls into doubt pretending  
To learning unlearned

846

With all faults exposed presumption  
Puts on a fig leaf

847

They bring themselves woe—the ignorant  
Ignoring wise counsel

848

Those who heed none nor see for themselves—  
Till death their life is a plague

849

One teaching the sightless is sightless—the sightless  
See as they've seen

850

Those who deny what the wise say—specters  
Haunting the earth

## 86. DISCORD

851

Discord—disease that breeds unnatural division  
Among all lives

852

Highest not to return evil in discord even if  
Aggrieved by division

853

It yields unfettered and unending light—ending  
The disease of discord

854

The joy of joys blossoms when discord  
Woe of woes disappears

855

Who can defeat them—those whose forbearance  
Defeats discord

856

The life that delights in division—poised  
On poverty and oblivion

857

The bitter who bring discord do not see  
The truth that brings triumph

858

To desist from discord brings wealth—to abet it  
Abets destruction

859

In abundance one sees no discord—in ruin  
One sees its rise

860

Discord occasions all bitterness—concord  
The peak of goodness

## 87. SPLENDOR FOR ENEMIES

861

Nurture no strife with those stronger—welcome  
Contention with those weaker

862

Without love without strength without strong friends  
How can one defeat enemies

863

Those fearful witless friendless ungiving—  
Easy prey for enemies

864

Easy for anyone anytime anywhere—the constantly angry  
Who cannot keep secrets

865

A delight to enemies—those with no goodness who seek no way  
See no shame and miss all chances

866

They will find their hostility hosted—those  
With blind rage and inordinate desire

867

Those who obstruct what they start—attain their enmity  
Even with gifts

868

They strengthen their enemies and lack friends—those  
With much vice and no virtue

869

For those with fearful and ignorant foes  
Joy is never out of reach

870

No fame attends failing to contend against little  
And angry fools

871

The kindness of enmity—not fit to wish for  
Even in jest

872

Oppose those who plow with bows—not those  
Who plow with words

873

Madder than madness is to make  
Many enemies alone

874

Those whose kindness turns enmity to friendship—the world  
Lives by their light

875

When alone with two enemies choose one  
To be a dear friend

876

Whether trusted or not neither trust  
Nor forsake one in trouble

877

Show no weakness to enemies—nor woes  
To friends who can't see them

878

Perceive strengthen and guard oneself and the pride  
Of one's enemies dies

879

Cut down brambles when small—grown  
They cut the cutting hand

880

One breath and they're gone—those who haven't toppled  
A foe's pride

## 89. ENEMIES WITHIN

881

Water and shade become bitter when bitter—relations  
Grow bitter by bitter deeds

882

Fear no enemies who appear like swords—fear enemies  
Who appear like kin

883

Guard against enemies within—unguarded they cleave  
Like knives through clay

884

If false-hearted enemies appear within they bring  
Great misery among kin

885

If enemies appear among kin they bring  
Many miseries that kill

886

If oneness disappears among one's own  
Hard ever to escape death

887

Even appearing like pot and lid enemies  
In family fit nothing

888

Like a rasp upon metal enemies within family  
Wear all of it away

889

Even if only the splinter of a seed enmity  
Within breeds ruin

890

Like living in a hut with snakes—life  
With those without concord

## 90. NOT SCORNING THE GREAT

891

Greatest protection for those that protect—not slighting  
The might of the mighty

892

One gains great suffering from the great  
In failing to respect the great

893

If one seeks ruin act without listening—if one seeks death  
Offend those above

894

Like summoning death—offending the mighty  
Without having might

895

Those who anger a king of cruel power—anywhere  
They go they're gone

896

Those who get burned can recover—those  
Who scorn the great cannot

897

What good are royal trappings and infinite wealth  
If the great in virtue grow angry

898

If those like mountains think it—those seeming to tower  
Disappear with their kin

899

If the highest in virtue are angered—even  
The king of the gods falls

900

Even with allies beyond measure one cannot escape  
If the greatest of the great grow angry

## 91. YIELDING TO WIVES

901

No virtue in craving one's wife—it is something unsought  
By those who crave deeds

902

The wealth of one craving his wife without care  
Brings shame on himself and all men

903

Among good people it always brings shame—losing  
Oneself to one's wife

904

One gaining no glory fearing his wife  
Gains no mastery of deeds

905

One fearing his wife fears to do good  
To good people at all times

906

One fearing the bamboo shoulders of his wife  
Even living like a god has nothing

907

Modesty in a woman is far more glorious  
Than servility in a man

908

They do no good nor help their friends—those  
Who follow their wives' brows

909

For him who does only his wife's bidding—no virtue  
No wealth no pleasure

910

A mind in place at work never knows the folly  
Of following one's wife

## 92. LIMITLESS WOMEN

911

They lead to ruin—the sweet words of well-bangled women  
Who seek money not love

912

Weigh good and stay clear of heartless women  
Speaking of heart but weighing gain

913

The false embrace of one selling herself—like gripping  
Some corpse in the dark

914

The wise seeking grace do not seek the thin pleasure  
Of those who seek only things

915

The wise of good minds do not seek the thin pleasure  
Of those whose goods are common

916

Those extending their goodness do not seek skilled arms  
Extending thin pleasures

917

Those without full hearts seek arms that embrace  
With hearts elsewhere

918

The embrace of false women—siren to those  
Without sense

919

The arms of women with jewels and no limits—hell  
Where heedless men sink

920

Consorts to those abandoned by fortune—dice  
Drink women of two minds



### 93. NOT DRINKING

921

They inspire no fear—they lose their glory—men  
Drowning in drink

922

Drink no drink but know if you do the wise  
Will see you as nothing

923

Ugly even before one's mother—what then  
Being drunk before the wise

924

On those who commit the vile error of drinking  
Modesty turns her back

925

Paying to be out of one's head—that is born  
Of not knowing one's way

926

The sleeping and the dead are not different—nor those  
Drinking poison and those drunk

927

Those drinking in secret eyes drooping—laughed at always  
By neighbors who see

928

No use saying I have never drunk—with drink  
What's hidden comes out

929

Arguing with a drunkard—like searching for a man  
Beneath water with a candle

930

When a man isn't drunk does he not see drink's stupor  
Seeing another man drink

931

Desire no dice though you might win—winning  
Is the hook the fish swallows

932

Do players who win one and lose one hundred have a way  
To thrive and win goodness

933

Their wealth and revenue roll away—those  
Who roll dice without ceasing

934

Dicing ruins reputations and brings many miseries—  
Nothing impoverishes faster

935

The greedy seeking dice dice halls and dice hands  
Devolve into nothing

936

Their bellies never fill—torments torment them—those swallowed  
By the woe of dice

937

Consigning one's time to the table old wealth  
And character disappear

938

Dicing destroys wealth afflicts anguish destroys goodness  
And makes a person a lie

939

If one takes to tables—no wealth no food no clothing  
No learning no light

940

As a player clings to dice in losing—life  
Clings to body in suffering

## 95. MEDICINE

941

Disease comes of too little or too much through the trio  
With wind named by authors

942

The body needs no medicine if one eats  
Only after digestion

943

Eat after digestion knowing one's limits—this way  
Those with a body live long

944

After digesting wait for hunger then savor with care  
What does not disagree

945

If one eats with measure what does not disagree  
Nothing threatens one's life

946

Those who eat knowing moderation know joy—as those  
Who devour know disease

947

Those who devour beyond their fire's limit  
Know disease beyond limit

948

Determine disease determine its cause determine its cure  
And cure unerringly

949

Time patient and disease—doctors perceive these  
In measure and proceed

950

Healer patient medicine preparer—these four  
Together are medicine

### **III ALL ELSE**

951

Natural only to those born to a home—modesty  
And morality together

952

Modesty conduct truthfulness—those born to a family  
Never slip from these three

953

Generosity cheer sweet words lack of scorn—these four  
Arise from true family

954

Even with millions upon millions those born to a family  
Do nothing demeaning

955

Even if their means of giving have fallen a long-standing family  
Does not fall from its nature

956

Those who uphold a faultless family do nothing  
Unfitting or false

957

Like a stain on the bright moon above—a flaw  
In one born to a family

958

If he has no kindness among his virtues the birth  
Of a man falls into doubt

959

As seedlings reveal the soil—words spoken  
Reveal one's family

960

If one seeks goodness seek modesty—if one seeks family  
Seek humility with all

961

However indispensable renounce anything  
That diminishes

962

Even for glory those who seek glorious command  
Do nothing inglorious

963

In adversity stand tall—in prosperity  
Remain humble

964

Like hair fallen from one's head—a man  
Fallen from his place

965

In descending to even the most minuscule diminishment  
Mountains diminish

966

It leads to neither name nor heaven—  
Why flatter those who scorn

967

Better to be dead and standing than trailing  
Detractors and living

968

If one's greatness of honor is gone is guarding  
One's body a remedy

969

They give up life for honor—those like the deer that dies  
If one hair gets lost

970

Those who won't live without honor—the world  
Worships their light

## 98. GREATNESS

971

Aspiration is glory—saying we can live  
Without it—disgrace

972

Birth is common to all—greatness born  
Of great deeds is not

973

Those without highness even high are not high—those without  
lowness  
Even low are not low

974

Like women of one mind a person is great  
Only by ruling oneself

975

The great enact the impossible  
Rightly and fully

976

The small do not know it—the desire to honor  
And emulate the great

977

When acclaim befalls those without eminence  
It leads to insolent action

978

Smallness adores and adorns itself—greatness  
Is always humble

979

Greatness is absence of arrogance—smallness  
Is arrogance everywhere

980

Greatness shields failings—smallness  
Proclaims every fault

## 99. INTEGRITY

981

For those upholding integrity knowing what fits  
Everything good is natural

982

Goodness for the wise—goodness of character—good  
Beyond all other goods

983

Modesty truth compassion love kindness—these five  
Are the bedrock of integrity

984

Tavam is not killing—and integrity  
Is not speaking ill of others

985

The strength of the strong is humility—with it  
The wise transform foes

986

Touchstone of integrity—accepting defeat  
Even against unequals

987

If one does nothing good to those not doing good  
What good is integrity

988

If one attains the strength of integrity  
Poverty is no disgrace

989

Those called oceans of integrity never crumble  
Though time itself crumbles

990

If those with integrity lose their integrity the wide earth  
Cannot bear the burden



991

From openness to all people the practice  
Of kindness comes easily

992

Love in one's heart and birth in good family together  
Are the way of kindness

993

Likeness in limbs is not likeness in people—likeness is likeness  
In kindness overflowing

994

Those who serve with justice and goodness—the world  
Celebrates their kind

995

Even in jest scorn is bitter—even in strife  
The kind remain kind

996

The world exists because people have kindness—if not  
It would plummet into dust

997

Even as sharp as a blade—without human kindness  
Men are blocks of wood

998

Even toward the unfriendly who do wrong it is last  
To be unkindly

999

For those who cannot smile—even in daylight the great  
Wide world is darkness

1000

Riches attained by those without kindness—like milk  
Soured by its jug

## 101. FRUITLESS WEALTH

1001

Dead with nothing left to do—those who've gathered  
Great wealth without tasting it

1002

The confusion of grasping saying wealth yields all  
Yields an ugly birth

1003

Their birth burdens the earth—men hungry to earn  
Who seek no renown

1004

One no one loves—what does he think  
He will leave behind

1005

Those who won't give and enjoy—even with billions  
They have nothing

1006

If one won't enjoy it nor give to the worthy  
The greatest wealth is misery

1007

Wealth ungiven to those without—like a woman of great goodness  
Growing old alone

1008

The wealth of one unloved—a poisonous tree  
Bearing fruit in the square

1009

Others will take it—all wealth amassed  
Without love enjoyment and virtue

1010

A moment of want for the worthy with wealth—merely rain  
Dried up for a time

## 102. HAVING MODESTY

1011

Modesty in action is modesty—different from the modesty  
Of fine women whose brows shine

1012

All may have food and clothing and such—the great  
Alone have modesty

1013

All lives entail bodies—all integrity  
The goodness of modesty

1014

Is not modesty a jewel for the wise—and without it  
Is not pride an affliction

1015

Those who fear shame in themselves and others—there  
Dwells modesty say the wise

1016

Without the shield of modesty the great do not want even  
The wide world

1017

Those who command modesty renounce life  
For modesty—not modesty for life

1018

If a man feels no shame for what shames others  
Virtue itself feels shame

1019

Errors in conduct sear family—absence of shame  
Sears all that is good

1020

Those moving without modesty—like puppets  
Alive only with strings

### 103. SERVING FAMILY

1021

No greater glory than greatness in action saying  
I won't ever cease

1022

Mastery of action fullness of knowledge—these  
Two thriving make family thrive

1023

For one saying I will raise up my family—divinity  
Girds up its loins and sets forth

1024

For those who strive for family without ceasing—success  
Obtains without planning

1025

Those without fault whose lives serve family—the wise  
Encircle them as kin

1026

To command the family of one's birth—that  
Is worthy command

1027

Like the strong-hearted in battle—those able in family  
Bear the weight

1028

There is no season for serving one's family—  
Dally in pride and it's gone

1029

The bodies of those who keep family from fault—are they only  
Vessels for suffering

1030

Without a good person to keep family upright  
Adversity fells it at its root

## 104. FARMING

1031

Turn as it will the world follows the plow—toil as one might  
Farming is highest

1032

Farmers sustain everyone not farming—they  
Are the pin holding the world together

1033

They live who live by farming—all others  
Follow and honor them for food

1034

They see many shelters beneath their king's shelter—  
Those whose fields shelter grain

1035

He who eats by his own hand does not beg  
And gives freely to beggars

1036

If farmers fold their arms those saying  
I need nothing cannot be

1037

If one dries it to one-fourth soil flourishes without even  
One handful of manure

1038

Better than plowing is spreading manure—better than water is  
watching  
The crops once weeded

1039

If its husbandman stays away the land pulls back  
And sulks like a wife

1040

The good earth laughs if she sees idle men  
Saying they have nothing

## 105. WANT

1041

What is as bitter as want—want alone  
Is as bitter as want

1042

Want is a wretch—it leaves one in want  
Here and hereafter

1043

The craving of want ruins long lineage  
And loveliness alike

1044

Even in those born to a family want yields despair  
That breeds vile words

1045

Of the suffering that is want  
Misery on misery arises

1046

Even if the destitute know and speak truth  
Their words falter and fail

1047

Want without virtue makes one a stranger even  
To one's own mother

1048

The lack that almost killed yesterday—  
Will it get me today

1049

One may sleep among flames but in poverty  
One's eyes find no rest

1050

Death to gruel and salt—those with nothing  
Who will not let go

## 106. BEGGING

1051

Seeing those fit for begging beg—refusing  
Is their fault not yours

1052

If what one begs brings no misery—begging  
Too is pleasure

1053

Before those who know duty whose hearts withhold nothing  
Begging has beauty

1054

From those who deny nothing even in dreams begging  
Is equal to giving

1055

Because some on earth deny nothing—one  
May stand in sight begging

1056

Seeing those with no woe of withholding  
All woes of poverty disappear

1057

Seeing people who give without scorn  
The heart rejoices within

1058

If there were no beggars in this great and green world  
Only puppets would come and go

1059

What splendor would the generous possess  
If no one undertook to beg

1060

A beggar should bear no anger—the woe of poverty  
Bears witness enough

## 107. DREAD OF BEGGING

1061

Even before eyes that delight in giving—ten million times better  
Not to beg

1062

If people must beg to live—may the maker  
Of this world perish

1063

No harshness more harsh than saying we'll end  
This hardship by begging

1064

The greatness of those with nothing who won't beg—  
Nothing can contain it

1065

Nothing sweeter than eating by one's labor—even  
If nothing but broth

1066

Nothing scorns a tongue more than begging—even  
To beg water for a cow

1067

I beg all who beg—beg if you must but never  
From those who won't give

1068

It shatters on the rock of refusal—the unsheltered  
Raft of begging

1069

Hearts wilt at the thought of begging—and die utterly  
At the thought of refusal

1070

Where can those who refuse hide—with a word  
A beggar's life passes



1071

The wicked appear so human—no others  
Look more like men

1072

The wicked are luckier than the good—nothing  
Troubles their hearts

1073

The wicked are like gods—they too  
Do as they please

1074

When the vicious see villains they delight  
In outdoing them

1075

Fear is the code of villains—and avarice  
A little if there

1076

The wicked are like drums—they broadcast  
Every secret they hear

1077

The wet hands of the wicked do not open except  
To fists that crack jaws

1078

The wise respond to one word—the vicious  
To being crushed like cane

1079

Seeing the food and clothing of others the wicked  
Seek out their faults

1080

What else are the wicked for—in hardship they rush  
To sell themselves

PART THREE

# LOVE

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# **I SECRET LOVE**

1081

Is she a siren a rare peacock a woman in jewels—  
My heart quakes

1082

As if on attack with an army of sirens—the look  
She gives when I look

1083

I did not know death but now I do—  
Fierce feminine eyes

1084

They don't fit this young woman—these eyes  
That kill those looking

1085

Is it death an eye a deer—her gaze  
Contains all three

1086

If they did not curve from her eyes her brows  
Would not make me tremble

1087

The clothing covering her breasts—like blinders that keep  
An elephant calm

1088

Feared in battle by foes my strength has fallen  
To this forehead of light

1089

Why all these jewels on this doe-eyed girl  
Already adorned in modesty

1090

Drink delights those drinking—not love  
Which delights those looking

## 110. KNOWING SIGNS

1091

Two looks in her eyelined eyes—one that brings illness  
And one that heals it

1092

Furtive and fleeting glances—not half of love—  
Far more

1093

She looked and looked down—that is how  
She watered affection

1094

When I look she looks at the ground—when I don't  
She looks smiling softly

1095

Without seeming to look she smiles as if  
Winking an eye

1096

Though they speak like strangers one sees  
When words lack malice

1097

Words that seem harsh—looks that seem cross—sign  
That those apart are together

1098

Her slenderness hints at hope—I look and her kindness  
Graces with a smile

1099

Looks as among strangers—found only  
Among lovers

1100

When eyes meet eyes mouths that speak  
Mean nothing

## 111. THE JOYS OF JOINING

1101

Sight sound taste touch smell—in this shining jewel  
I know all five

1102

Ailment is other than cure—but this beauty  
Cures the ailment she causes

1103

Can the world of the lotus-eyed god be sweeter  
Than sleep in my love's soft arms

1104

It cools when near and burns when far—where  
Did she get this fire

1105

Like all one desires at once—her arms  
And her braid of flowers

1106

They are made of ambrosia—each time her arms touch me  
I come alive

1107

The embrace of this golden girl—like feasting with guests  
In one's home

1108

Sweetest for lovers—an embrace without  
Room for air

1109

Turning returning reuniting—these are the fruits  
Of those joined in love

1110

Like the unknowing we know the more that we know—my love  
For this jewel the more that we join

## 112. IN PRAISE OF HER

1111

Live long most delicate anicham—she whom I love  
Is more delicate than you

1112

You swoon at flowers my heart—thinking flowers  
That anyone sees are her eyes

1113

Her smile—pearls—her arms—bamboo—her smell—perfume—  
Her body—new leaves—and her dark eyes—lances

1114

If water lilies could see they would look to the ground  
Unable to match this beauty's eyes

1115

No good drums for her waist—she wore  
An anicham with its stem

1116

The stars wander from their places not knowing  
The moon from her face

1117

Does her face have flaws like the pockmarked moon  
Shining only when full

1118

Moon live long—if you shone like her face you too  
Would have my love

1119

Moon—to equal her face with her eyes like flowers  
Do not appear to so many

1120

Anicham petals and swan feathers—berries of thorns  
To her feet

### 113. IN PRAISE OF LOVE

1121

She of soft words—what glistens on her teeth  
Is milk mixed with honey

1122

What connects body and breath—that  
Connects me to her

1123

Image be gone from my eye—there isn't  
Any room for the brow I love

1124

This jewel adorned in perfection—her presence is life  
And her absence death

1125

I could remember her nature and bright warring eyes If I forgot—  
but  
I can't forget

1126

Even if I blink he stays in my eyes unharmed—my love  
So subtle and fine

1127

He dwells in my eyes so I do not paint them—I would not  
Want to hide him

1128

He dwells in my heart so I fear hot food—I would not  
Want him to get burned

1129

If I close my eyes he'll vanish—that's why this place  
Calls him heartless

1130

He dwells forever with joy in my heart—but this place  
Thinks he's heartless and gone



## 114. DOWN WITH DECORUM

1131

No way but this for those suffering love—the power  
Of a horse made of palms

1132

Down with decorum—my body and soul cannot bear it  
And will ride the palm

1133

Then I had power and proportion—now  
I have the palmhorse of lovers

1134

The storm of love carries it away—the raft  
Of proportion and power

1135

Gift from her with bangles like garlands—this misery  
At twilight and this palm

1136

This girl keeps my eyes open—even at midnight  
I think to ride the palm

1137

Nothing is greater than a woman—even suffering a sea of love  
She mounts no palm

1138

Without pity or thought love entered the square  
With our secret

1139

Love thought that none knew but now turns  
Bewildered in the streets

1140

They laugh in my sight—the clueless  
Who haven't felt what I feel

1141

People talk and dear life continues—by grace  
Many don't know this

1142

Not knowing this girl of flower eyes is so rare the place talks  
And gives her to me

1143

Even without having it I have it—isn't that  
Because people talk

1144

This love grows on gossip—without it  
It would shrivel and die

1145

Like desire for drink in drinking—the more people say  
The sweeter the love

1146

We saw each other once but they talk like  
A snake swallowed the moon

1147

With talk as manure and mother's words as water  
This illness grows and grows

1148

Like dousing a fire with oil—dousing  
This love with talk

1149

He that said not to worry left and shamed me—why  
Be ashamed of rumor

1150

This place has talked as we'd wished—now  
He'll wish to do right

## **II WEDDED LOVE**

1151

If not going tell me—if coming back quickly  
Tell those still living

1152

His sight brought pleasure but fearing he'll go  
His touch brings pain

1153

His words mean nothing—he knows  
But parting still looms

1154

If he says not to worry and leaves—is it the fault  
Of those who believed

1155

Avert his departure if one would avert—departed  
There will be no reunion

1156

If his heart can tell me he's going—how  
Can I hope he'll return

1157

Do these bangles that slip from my wrists not say  
This captain is sailing

1158

It's bitter to live without sisters—and worse  
Without him who was sweet

1159

Does fire which burns when touched burn  
Like love abandoned

1160

Those who bear the unbearable—their hearts healed  
The absence borne—there are so many

1161

I hide my ailment but it wells like water  
To those drawing

1162

I cannot hide this ailment nor tell it without shame  
To him ailing me

1163

Love and shame hang from the ends of my life  
On a body that cannot bear it

1164

Right here the sea of love and no vessel  
To cross it safely

1165

What would they bring in hatred—those  
Bringing woe in love

1166

Love is an ocean of bliss but the pain  
It brings is greater

1167

In love's vast waters I see no shore—no one but me  
In the night

1168

With me alone for company it puts all other lives  
To sleep—the night is so kind

1169

More cruel than his cruelties—these nights  
That pass so slowly

1170

Could they go to him like my thoughts my eyes  
Would not swim in tears

## 118. THE LONGINGS OF EYES

1171

They showed me the sight that ails me—why  
Do these eyes weep

1172

These eyelined eyes that saw without seeing—why  
Do they suffer without seeing

1173

These eyes that rushed to see now weep—  
How laughable

1174

They've dried up from weeping—these eyelined eyes that brought  
This endless disease

1175

These eyes that brought illness beyond oceans  
Now suffer beyond sleep

1176

The eyes that brought me this illness  
Now suffer it—how sweet

1177

May these eyes that loved and longed to see him  
Weep and weep and dry up

1178

My loveless beloved is alive—but my eyes  
Cannot rest without seeing him

1179

He goes they don't sleep he comes they don't sleep—torture  
For eyes either way

1180

It's not hard for neighbors to know what's hidden  
When you have drums for eyes like me

1181

I let my love leave—whom can I tell  
How I've paled

1182

Because he gave love—this pallor  
Spreads over my body

1183

He took beauty and modesty and gave  
In return this sickness and pallor

1184

I think and speak his virtues alone and still  
This pallor weasels in

1185

Look there—he goes—look here—this pallor  
Comes to my body

1186

As darkness awaits the lamp going out this pallor awaits  
His arms letting go

1187

I embraced I shifted and in only that shifting  
This pallor took hold

1188

Everybody says she's pallid—nobody says  
He left her

1189

May my body pale completely if my love  
Remains well

1190

Good to bear the name pallid if no one  
Calls my love loveless

1191

Those having the love of their beloved  
Have love's fruit without stones

1192

Like rain to the living the gift a beloved  
Gives his love

1193

Known only to lovers who are loved—the glory  
Of saying we live

1194

If their beloved does not love them even  
Those loved are loveless

1195

If he does not love—what does the one  
We love give us

1196

Love with one side is bitter—with two balanced  
Like a pole it is sweet

1197

Standing on one person's side does love not see  
This torture and torment

1198

No hearts are harder than those living on earth  
Without their beloved's sweet words

1199

Even if my beloved is loveless every word of him  
Is sweet to my ear

1200

You tell your pain to him who won't hear—  
Dear heart—close up the sea



1201

The thought alone brings endless delight—love  
Is sweeter than wine

1202

All of love is sweet—remember your beloved  
And nothing else matters

1203

Did he only seem to remember—this sneeze  
Died before it came

1204

Am I there too in his heart—he  
Is always in mine

1205

He looks me from his heart—does he feel  
No shame to enter mine

1206

I live reliving our days—without that  
How would I live

1207

I know no forgetting and each thought burns—what  
Would happen if I forgot

1208

No matter my thought he never gets angry—how great  
My lover's regard

1209

My sweet life withers thinking of his cruelty—he  
Who said we weren't two

1210

Stay and shine dear moon—I would see him who left  
Without leaving

## 122. TALK OF DREAMS

1211

This dream with its message from him—what  
Can I offer it

1212

If my dark carp-like eyes would sleep when I begged  
I could tell my love I endure

1213

My love with no love in life—I see him  
In dreams and live

1214

Dreams give me love—they bring me  
Him with no love in life

1215

Seeing him in dreams—as sweet in that moment  
As seeing him in life

1216

If there wasn't this waking—the love in my dreams  
Would never leave

1217

Why does this brute without love in life  
Torment me so in dreams

1218

I sleep—he lies in my arms—I wake—  
He's back in my heart

1219

They call him loveless in life—those  
Who don't see him in dreams

1220

These people who say he's left me in life—  
Do they not see him in dreams

### 123. THE MISERY OF EVENING

1221

You are not evening but the lance that ends wives—  
Time—live long

1222

Is your husband hard-hearted like mine—bless you  
You wretched bewildering evening

1223

This evening once pale and trembling now blossoms  
As hardship and pain

1224

Without my beloved the evening arrives like a foe  
On the field of death

1225

What evil did I do the evening—what good  
Did I do the dawn

1226

Those moments with him I did not know  
The miseries of evening

1227

At dawn it buds—all day it swells—and at dusk  
It blossoms—this disease

1228

Battle-axe and emissary of evening ablaze—  
The cowherd's flute

1229

When the evening baffles the senses sorrow  
Will baffle this place

1230

As evening bewilders thinking of him who thinks only  
Of wealth this endless life ends

## 124. THE DROOPING OF LIMBS

1231

Your eyes shy even from flowers thinking of him  
Far off who left us in sadness

1232

They say our beloved does not love us—these eyes  
Grown pale with tears

1233

They announce his absence—these shoulders  
That swelled for your wedding

1234

When he left these arms lost their luster—now  
They are losing their bangles

1235

These arms without luster or bangles  
Proclaim this brute's brutality

1236

My arms and bangles slip but what hurts  
Is calling him brutal

1237

By telling this brute the uproar of my arms  
Would you gain honor my heart

1238

The brow of my love in bangles went pale  
Even loosening my arms

1239

One puff of air entered our embrace and her eyes  
Fresh as rain grew pale

1240

Seeing what her bright forehead could do the pallor  
Of her eyes felt pain

## 125. TO HER HEART

1241

Heart—for this disease without end  
Can you find no cure

1242

How stupid to suffer when he has  
No love—bless you my heart

1243

He that brought this woe does not feel pity—  
Why sit here and pine my heart

1244

They'll devour me longing to see him—take  
My eyes with you my heart

1245

This love who does not love us—can we hate him  
And leave him my heart

1246

You see him who soothes but fail to sulk—  
Your anger is fake my heart

1247

Drop love or drop modesty good heart—  
I cannot bear both

1248

How stupid my heart—you go to him thinking  
He's loveless in ignorance

1249

Our love dwells within you—whom  
Do you seek my heart

1250

If he who left me stays in my heart I'll lose  
What beauty remains

1251

The door of restraint bolted with modesty—battered  
By the axe of aching

1252

Love has no pity—even at midnight  
My heart labors

1253

I hide my love but it comes out  
Despite me like a sneeze

1254

I thought I had restraint but this love  
Escapes into the open

1255

The dignity that won't follow them who've left—unknown  
To those sick with love

1256

What a fine affliction—it wants me  
To follow him who left

1257

I know nothing of shame when he does  
What I love for love

1258

The forces that ruin my modesty—are they not  
The sweet nothings of a fraud

1259

I went to sulk but instead embraced—my heart  
Saw us conjoining

1260

We whose hearts melt like butter in fire—do we ever  
Turn from his touch

1261

My eyes grow weak and lose luster—my fingers grow worn  
Numbering the days he's been gone

1262

Glittering friend—if I forget him bangles and beauty  
Will slip from my arms forever

1263

With his heart he left seeking gain—seeking  
His return I'm still here

1264

My heart climbs higher and higher believing  
He will come back with love

1265

May these eyes feast upon him—these lean shoulders  
Will then cease to be pale

1266

I'll relish my love till all illness is gone—let him  
Return for one day

1267

When my love dear as eyes returns will  
I sulk Or welcome or take him

1268

May the king fight and win—that evening  
I shall dine with my wife

1269

Each day is seven for those who await  
A traveler's return

1270

What good to have or have had or hold  
If one's heart is broken

1271

Your dark eyes cannot hide it—they  
Have something to say

1272

My bamboo-armed beauty who fills my eyes  
Is being too much a lady

1273

Like thread between beads something  
Shows in her beauty

1274

Like the fragrance in a budding blossom there is something  
In her budding smile

1275

The secret singing of her bangles  
Bears the remedy for my ills

1276

The passion and fire of his embrace  
Tell me they'll disappear

1277

The coolness of my lover from cool shores—my bangles  
Know it before I do

1278

My love left yesterday but my body  
Has been pale for seven

1279

She looked at her bangles her arms her feet—  
That's what she did

1280

Women among women—those whose eyes tell  
The love that ails them



## 129. LONGING FOR UNION

1281

Rejoicing on thinking—delighting on looking—it happens  
With love not wine

1282

When love surpasses the size of a tree no need  
For one seed of sulking

1283

Though he does as he cares without care my eyes cannot rest  
Without seeing my husband

1284

Friend—I went to sulk—but my heart went  
To his side forgetting

1285

Like eyes that don't see the brush that paints them  
I see no faults when I see him

1286

When seeing I see no failings—not seeing  
I see nothing else

1287

Like one who jumps knowing the current—why sulk  
Knowing its failure

1288

Great cheat—your chest is like wine—one drinks  
Despite your disgrace

1289

Love is more fragile than a flower—few  
Can meet its moment

1290

Her eyes withdrew but her arms embraced even  
More eagerly than mine

1291

Heart—seeing that his heart is his  
Why aren't you mine

1292

My heart—you see he's loveless yet go to him  
Thinking he won't anger

1293

My heart—do you follow him to show  
The ruined have no friends

1294

Heart—you savor without sulking—who  
Will listen to you now

1295

My heart is endless heartache—it fears not having—  
And having—fears losing

1296

When I am alone thinking my heart's here  
To eat at me

1297

I forget all modesty with this feeble foolish heart  
That will not forget him

1298

Ashamed to disdain him this heart clings to life  
Dwelling on his goodness

1299

If one's own heart isn't a friend—who  
Will befriend one in sorrow

1300

If one's own heart isn't kin it is nothing  
That strangers aren't kind

### 131. SULKING

1301

Sulk and keep from his arms—let us  
See him suffer a little

1302

Sulking is like salt—a little much  
Is too much

1303

Fleeing without embracing the one sulking—like afflicting  
The one afflicted

1304

Like severing the root of a withered vine—not turning  
To those turned away

1305

Sulking in those with flower-like eyes  
Is beauty even for the good

1306

Without quarrels or sulking love  
Is a rotten or unripened fruit

1307

The sorrow of sulking—not knowing how long  
The reunion will last

1308

Without a lover who sees that one suffers  
What good is suffering

1309

Sulking in love is sweet—as water  
In shade is sweet

1310

With one able to keep wasting away  
My heart yearns only for union

## 132. SULKING'S SUBTLETIES

1311

The eyes of women feast on your chest—I will not  
Lie with what's left

1312

I sulked and he sneezed thinking  
I might say bless you

1313

If I wear a garland of new flowers she fumes  
Saying I wear them for another

1314

I said that our love is greater than any and she sulked  
Which any which any

1315

I said we won't part in this life—and her eyes  
Overflowed with tears

1316

I remembered you I said and she pulled back—  
So you forgot

1317

I sneezed and she blessed me—then wept  
Saying who made you sneeze

1318

I held back a sneeze and she wept saying  
Whose thought do you hide

1319

If I calm her she fumes saying you are like this  
With them too aren't you

1320

If I gaze at her and think—she fumes saying  
Who do you think of gazing

### 133. SULKING AND BLISS

1321

Though he's done no wrong pulling back  
Brings him closer

1322

Though care at first may sag—sulking's small angers  
Strengthen affection

1323

Hearts joined like earth and water—what heaven  
Transcends their sulking

1324

Found in pulling from embraces—the forces  
That open my heart

1325

Even free of wrong there is something in keeping  
From my love's soft arms

1326

Sweeter than eating—having eaten—sweeter than loving—  
Sulking in love

1327

When hearts come together we see it—in sulking  
Those who lose win

1328

Will we sulk and know it again—the taste of us joining  
Her forehead glistening

1329

Sulk my bright jewel—and may our night  
Of pleading be long

1330

Sulking in love is joy—and joining  
Again—joy of joys

# A COMMENTARY OF NOTES

## PART ONE VIRTUE

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### I. IN PRAISE OF GOD

It has long been customary in Tamil, as in many other Indian languages and traditions, to begin a work with a prayer song. These prayers offer praise to a deity or deities in the hope that the poet may complete the work that he or she has felt called to begin. In the first chapter of the four-chapter introduction to the Tirukkural, Tiruvalluvar gives ten verses that are inclusive enough for commentators of all kinds to have found reflections of their own traditions within them. One may see these qualities as qualities of God, or of particular gods, or of the god-like *tirthankaras*, the spiritual teachers, of Jainism.

Quotation marks indicate a literal translation. Their absence indicates an additional connotation or interpretive note on context. When giving several literal translations for a single word, I repeat the one I've chosen to draw attention to the full array of possibilities one would find consulting a Tamil dictionary. Translations or interpretations separated by a comma indicate synonyms; translations or interpretations separated by a semicolon indicate different and sometimes competing possibilities.

**1** *God*: “primordial being,” “first mover,” “Lord of the Beginning.” This kural is usually thought to be about letters: Just as the Tamil alphabet begins with the letter A, so too does the world begin with God. However, the word for “letter” refers even more deeply to the sound that is the basis of speech. As the great Tamil grammarians make clear, language begins with sound, to which we then give written form. The “ah” of breath is the beginning of all sounds and letters; like this, the world begins in that Being which begins.

**2** *touching the feet*: worshipping.

**3** *At the feet*: “joined to the feet.” To be one with; to set one’s mind-and-heart upon a god without ceasing.

*mind in flower*: “he who walks upon flowers,” “he who enters the flower of our hearts.”

5 *The two deeds that bring darkness*: good deeds and bad deeds, both of which bring confusion.

Both kinds of deeds lead back to the cycle of rebirth. The release that the Kural has as its ultimate aim goes beyond the cycle of good and evil.

God: “God,” “Lord,” “King.”

7 *hard*: that is, impossible. *hearts*: heart-and-mind.

8 *compassion*: “virtue,” the first of the three parts of the Kural. *the other two*: the other great “oceans,” wealth and love, the second and third parts of the Kural. All three are realms where a person can drown.

10 *swim the sea of birth*: implicitly, cross to the other side. God: “God,” “Lord,” “King.”

## 2. THE GLORY OF RAIN

The order of Tiruvalluvar’s chapters offers its own silent commentary, with the glory of rain second only to the glories of divinity.

11 *ambrosia*: as in Greek mythology, the nectar of the gods that yields eternal life.

12 In Tamil, this verse sounds like rain. Here is a rough transliteration:  
*Tuppaarkku tuppaaya tuppaakki tuppaarkku Tuppaaya tuuum mazhai*

14 *wealth*: natural and continual abundance.

16 *hard*: that is, impossible.

17 *gather*: both in the sense of gathering together and of gathering water from the sea.

18 *below*: on earth.

19 *austerity*: *tavam*, that virtue or power by which a person achieves a greater form of connection by letting go of some desire. See chapter 27.

20 *flow*: Tiruvalluvar uses the word “flow,” *olukku*, to refer simultaneously to the flowing of water and to the conduct that flows from a person of character.

This image of conduct as akin to water flowing on earth deeply informs Tiruvalluvar’s understanding of virtue. In both this translation and its notes, wherever one sees the word “conduct,” one should also think of the image of water flowing.

### 3. THE GREATNESS OF LETTING GO

“The Greatness of Renunciants.”

**21** *that way / Which is theirs:* The word here for “way,” *olukkam*, comes from the same root as the word in verse 20 for “flow,” *olukku*. Just as water flows through the earth, fitting the land that it touches, so too can a human being live in that way that is uniquely their own.

**23** *the two:* the cycle of birth and the release from the cycle of birth. Notice that while letting go is clearly great, Tiruvalluvar devotes twenty chapters to the way of the householder and thirteen to the way of renunciation. Many glories may be great.

**24** *the five:* the five senses. See kural 27.

The unspoken image is of an elephant that a person guides with a prod.

**25** Commentators give different reasons for how Indra bears witness to the power that commands the senses. Some say that he managed to achieve this power and by doing so earned his position as ruler. Others see him instead as a negative example, citing the story of how he seduced Ahalya, the wife of the sage Gautama, and was then cursed by the sage. But perhaps both interpretations are true. The power that commands all five must continue to command all five.

**26** *the impossible:* “that which is hard to do,” “that which is rare to do.”

**27** *The world:* In Tiruvalluvar and in Tamil, “the world” also means the community of the learned and wise.

**28** *The secret:* words that have power hidden within them, like words spoken by saints.

*those of true words:* When those of true words speak, what they say happens in the world.

**29** *hard:* that is, impossible.

*One moment of rage:* Even saints who have climbed the great hill of character are subject to human emotion. In the moment between when they first feel anger and when they cool that anger, that anger has extraordinary power.

**30** *embody grace:* “are beautiful,” “are blessed.”

*they show / Compassion to all:* they move like water that flows, showing grace and compassion to all beings.



#### 4.THE IMPERATIVE OF RIGHT ACTION

*Right Action*: “virtue,” “compassion,” “generosity.”

31 *A life*: a living being; that part of a body that is alive.

34 *purity*: “the action of becoming free of all taints.”

35 *freedom from*: “the happening unstained by.”

36 *without waiting*: literally, without saying “we can know and act later.”  
*remains / Beside one*: is a companion, an aid, a foundation.

37 *No need to speak of virtue*: literally, no need to say “this is what’s right.”

*who is borne / And who bears*: In one interpretation, by right action one attains in another birth the place of the one bearing or the one borne. In another interpretation, right action carries us even after the death of our body.

38 *the way back*: the way back to the cycle of birth and death.

39 *Right action*: Parimēlalakar links the right action spoken of in this kural with the home life described in the next twenty chapters.

40 *Action that fits*: action that fits a particular person. It is key that although birth is common to all, the two ways of life that Tiruvalluvar delineates—the householder’s and the renunciant’s—are distinct. What is virtue to one may be vice to another. Everything hinges on what fits a person and the way of life that is theirs.

#### II. HOUSEHOLDING

#### 5. THE HOME LIFE

Both the life pertaining to a home and the life of the home itself. Without them, the rest of the world falls apart.

41 *One at home*: often translated as “householder” but as much about the inner life and orientation of such a figure as about his place in the outer world.

*stands in goodness*: literally, stands on the way or path of goodness. The word here for “way” can also mean “river.” *the three other stations*: the student, the one who retires with his wife to the forest, and the renunciant

or ascetic.

**43** *Nothing is higher*: Here Tiruvalluvar uses the Tamil word for “head” to refer to what stands above all other possibilities. Just as the head is the highest part of the human body, the honoring of these realms is the highest part of human life. *Spirits*: forebears, ancestors.

**45** *root and flower*: “its nature and its reward.”

**47** *stands above*: “is head to,” “is chief among.”

**48** *The home life that guides others*: both in the sense of helping others on their way and of being exemplary and unerring in virtue. *guides*: helps others flow like water. The verb in Tamil, *olukki*, comes from the same root as *olukku* in 20 and *olukkam* in 21.

**50** *thriving in the life at home*: flourishing in the practice of virtue.

## 6. IN PRAISE OF ONE'S LIFE COMPANION

Although this chapter is concerned with what it means to be a wife, its title places the emphasis on the quality of companionship, leaving the companion's gender unspecified. The qualities described here are qualities we might praise in many kinds of people, depending on the play of circumstance. These verses are simultaneously about husbands and wives, and more than husbands and wives.

**51** *greatness*: greatness of character and greatness of action. *husband*: literally, “the one who has received one.” *Abundance*: income, means, fertility, fullness.

**54** *fidelity*: another age would render this as “chastity,” but “chastity” is too chaste for the power that Tamil and Tiruvalluvar perceive in this quality.

**56** *Her husband*: literally, “the one who has received one.”  
*the power of words*: the words spoken about her and the words she speaks.

**57** *walls*: the image is of the walls of a prison.  
*safety within*: the unwavering firmness and strength of fidelity. *Keeps her safe*: is the highest form, the “head,” of safety.

## 7. HAVING CHILDREN

**61** *Children with knowledge*: Tiruvalluvar is concerned not simply with

the bearing of children but with the way in which knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom are passed down generation by generation.

**62** *all seven lives*: according to Parimēlaḷakar, the seven kinds of birth that a life can take: vegetable, reptilian, marine, avian, four-legged, human, and divine. Commentators also interpret this phrase as meaning seven consecutive births through which a single life may pass.

**63** *one's deeds*: the deeds of one's parents.

**64** *ambrosia*: as in kural 11, the nectar of the gods that yields eternal life. For those versed in classical Tamil literature, this kural brings to mind the following poem by Pāṇṭiyaṇ Aṟivuṭai Nampi, collected in the anthology *Puṛanāṇūru*, which pre-dates the Kural by several centuries:

*Even if he makes much and eats with many  
Owning great riches if no children  
Enter in taking tiny steps stretching little hands  
Throwing touching grabbing smearing  
Spreading ghee rice all over  
Their bodies beguiling all sense  
All a man's days mean nothing*

**66** *babble*: the sweet prattle of young voices discovering the world.

**67** *among men*: literally, “in the assembly of the learned.”

**70** *What did he do to have him*: what austerities did he undertake to be blessed with him.

## 8. HAVING LOVE

Tamil has many words for love, each with its own flavor and sphere. The love here is the love of family, different from the romantic and erotic love of part III and the impartial love for all beings of the renunciant.

**71** *the fullness of one's heart*: including the sense of compassion by which one sees the hardship faced by another.

**72** *Bones too*: some commentators take this as a reference to the sage Dadhichi, said to have offered up his bones to Indra, Lord of the Gods, in a battle between good and evil.

**74** *Glory*: the word here also suggests release from the cycle of birth and death.

75 Householders achieve release through the joys of married life; renunciants achieve release through the hardship of austerities.

76 *friend*: companion, support, aid, defense.

77 *a body writhing without bones*: a worm squirming on the ground.

78 Implicitly, without love in one's heart one doesn't live.

79 *what good / Is the eye of a body*: what good are all the outer organs.

## 9. HOSPITALITY

In Tamil, the word for “hospitality” combines a word for “stranger” or “guest” with a word for “to care for,” “to cherish,” or “to protect.” To offer hospitality is to cherish and protect the stranger who arrives at one's door.

81 *generosity*: the word Tiruvalluvar uses for “generosity” can also mean “the cultivation of soil.” Generosity, as both Tamil and English suggest, is rooted in the practice of generation.

82 *nectar of the gods*: “undying medicine,” “medicine that keeps one from death.”

84 *Prosperity*: Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, evoked in the Tamil with an epithet meaning “she who makes everything happen.”

85 *who partakes with his guests*: the Tamil offers the sense both that one's guests eat first and that one's guests eat as one eats oneself.

86 *Guests to the gods above*: here “guests” carries the sense of “welcome guests,” “good guests,” “guests of excellent quality.”

87 *it rests / On the nature of each guest*: is proportionate to the goodness of each guest.

88 *who don't dare*: who do not undertake, with the sense of the head—the highest part of the body—leading.

89 *fools*: in the Tamil, the word also suggests miserliness.

90 *Anicham flowers*: flowers said to be exceedingly delicate. *When a face turns sour*: when the face of a host turns sour.

## 10. SWEET SPEECH

“Saying What Is Sweet.” In the Tamil, the phrase isn’t burdened with connotations of “sweet talk” or “sweet talking” as in English. To speak what is sweet is to speak without guile.

**91** *love*: the Tamil word here also means “wetness,” “moisture,” and “the coolness of water.” Just as good conduct is akin to the way that streams and rivers fit the land through which they flow, love is akin to the life-giving coolness of water.

**92** *with a smile*: with one’s face blossoming. Even when we feel we have nothing to give, we can give a few sweet words.

**93** *right action*: “virtue.”

**94** *hardship of hunger*: the hardship of not eating, of not being able to feed the senses.

**96** *Good*: “virtue.”

*wrong*: “that which is not [good],” “those things which are not [good].”

**97** *grant*: yield, grow. *goodness*: fruit, benefit.

*Without ceasing to be sweet*: “without turning from their nature,” understood implicitly to be sweet.

**98** *Here and hereafter*: in this life and the next.

**100** *eating sour*: seizing unripened fruit, still sour and bitter to the tongue.

## 11. GRATITUDE

Not simply a feeling but the action of remembering the good others have done.

**103** Not only is good to be done without reference to past gains but also without reference to future profit.

**104** *tree*: literally, a palmyra tree, both imposing in size and eminently useful for its wood, leaves, sap, and fruit. *seed*: literally, a tiny millet seed.

**105** Compare with kural 87.

**106** *Who held*: who was one’s strength and support.

**107** *Remembered*: implicitly, remembered by those of goodness. *seven births*: see the note to kural 62.

**108** Remembering afflicts the rememberer, not the wrongdoer.

**109** *the worst / Of wrongs*: “wrongs tantamount to murder,” “wrongs tantamount to killing.”

**110** *redemption*: “redemption,” “escape.”

## **12. FAIRNESS**

To stand in the middle in upright impartiality.

**111** *Fairness*: “propriety,” “fitness,” “fittingness,” “excellence.” **115** *wisdom*: “the wise,” “people of greatness.”

**117** *decline*: financial decline, poverty.  
*the wise*: “the world.” See the note to kural 27.

**118** *an impartial mind*: “not bending to one side.”

**119** *absent*: “entirely absent.”

## **13. SELF-CONTROL**

**121** *darkness*: “unbearable darkness,” “hell.”

**122** *truth*: “truth,” “meaning,” “thing,” “wealth.”

**123** *the path of wisdom*: “on the path of knowing knowledge.” *glory and renown*: recognition and esteem from the wise.

**124** *Steady in one’s state*: standing firm on the path that is one’s own.

**125** *the wealthy*: those rich not simply in material means but in learning and family.

**126** *all five*: the five senses. See kural 27.  
*like a tortoise*: as a tortoise contains its five limbs. *seven lives*: see the note to kural 62.

**128** *Even once with harsh words*: this can also be translated “even with one harsh word.”

**129** *words*: “tongues,” “a tongue.”

130 The god of virtue arrives on their path at the moment they need it most.

#### 14. THE POSSESSION OF CONDUCT

*Conduct: olukkam*, the way of life that fits each person, as water fits the earth and flows. See also the notes to kurals 20 and 21.

133 *Falls low*: “gains a low birth.” As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it: “Even if one is born into a low community, by one’s conduct one is high; even if one is born into a high community, by losing conduct one is low.”

134 *may be relearned*: if a Brahmin forgets a mantra, he can relearn it without doing harm to his standing and his people.

*Destroys his birth*: implicitly, he destroys his people and their way of life as well. 140 *flow with*: move in harmony with. See the notes to kurals 20 and 21.

#### 15. FIDELITY

“Not Desiring Another Man’s Wife.”

143 *more than dead*: though their bodies may be alive, their lives have ended.

144 *The heedless man*: “the one not attending even a millet seed’s worth to what he is doing.”

147 *A man*: a householder.

148 *virtue*: “virtue to the wise.”

*fortitude*: “great strength,” “great manhood,” “great mastery.”

149 *this earth of fierce waters*: this land encircled by fearsome seas.

150 *evil*: “evil,” “wrong,” “sin,” “vice.”

#### 16. FORBEARANCE

151 *digging*: “those who dig.” *scorn*: “those who scorn.”

152 *forget it*: forget it at once. See also kural 108.

154 *excellence*: “excellence,” “perfection,” “integrity,” “fullness of character.”

157 *wrong*: “that which is not fitting.”

**158** *arrogant insolence*: transgressions arising from transgression. *Inborn patience*: forbearance, with the additional sense of fitting what is great and true.

**159** *saints*: renouncers.

*Vicious mouths*: “the bitter words of impudent mouths.”

**160** *harsh words*: “the bitter words spoken by others.”

## 17. FREEDOM FROM ENVY

**161** *way*: “path,” “river.”

*virtue*: conduct. Tiruvalluvar uses the same word here as in kural 20, *olukku*. The way of virtue is like a flowing river. *freedom / From*: “the nature of not having,” “the quality of not having.”

**166** *family*: “those surrounding,” “those encircling.”

**167** *Fortune*: Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

*her wayward sister*: Lakshmi’s older sister, the goddess of misfortune.

**168** *the fire*: hell.

## 18. FREEDOM FROM GREED

**171** *good things*: life’s necessities, what’s needed for virtue.

**172** *wrong*: “that which is censured.” *bias*: “lack of fairness.”

**173** *wrong*: “that which is not virtuous.”

*another pleasure*: the unending delight that comes from virtue.

**174** *see*: “see without fault,” “see without distortion.”

**175** *great learning*: “fine and expansive knowledge.”

**176** *the seeker of grace*: one on the path of virtue seeking grace. **179**

*fortune*: Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

*embraces*: “joins with.”

## 19. FREEDOM FROM BACKBITING

“Not Speaking Behind,” “Not Speaking Outside.”

**182** *cursing*: defying, flouting, blaspheming.

**184** *speaking evil*: “speaking what’s not kind,” “speaking what’s not



compassionate,” “cutting one’s own eye by one’s talk.” *forgetting what follows*: forgetting consequences.

**185** *Vile and backbiting words*: “baseness that bites backs.” *hearts / That speak no virtue*: implicitly, mouths that pretend goodness.

**187** *with their words*: with backbiting words.  
*speak joyfully and make friends*: enjoy true friendship. Tiruvalluvar’s comment on Iago a millennium before Shakespeare wrote *Othello*.

**190** *soul*: “life that endures.”

## 20. FREEDOM FROM FRUITLESS SPEECH

**191** *many*: implicitly, an assembly of the wise.

**194** *denatured words*: words without quality or character.  
*an assembly*: an assembly of the wise.

**196** *husk*: “husk,” “chaff.”

**197** *without goodness*: “without goodness,” “without justice,” “without excellence,” “without heart.”

**198** *the highest fruit*: salvation, release.

## 21. FEAR OF WRONGDOING

**201** *fear*: dread.  
*confusion*: “confusion,” “arrogance,” or the arrogance that comes from confusion. Commentators often speak of this state as a kind of intoxication.

**202** In the Tamil, Tiruvalluvar plays on the similarities between the words for “wrong” and “fire.” Both come from the same root, which suggests that wrongdoing, like a fire, can burn the one who starts it and spiral easily out of control. Unlike fire, however, the consequences of wrongdoing can appear far removed in time and space.

**204** *when forgetful*: accidentally, inadvertently. *virtue*: the god of virtue.  
*means harm / To*: this can also be translated as “renounces,” for in the absence of virtue, harm comes of a course.

**205** *again and again*: implicitly, in this life and the next.

**208** *Like a shadow underfoot*: just as a shadow remains beneath the

person who casts it.

**209** *think*: the word in Tamil conveys the sense of “approach with the mind.”

## 22. KNOWING WHAT IS FITTING

A particularly Tamil idea, not found in the same way in the Sanskrit Vedas.

**211** *Kindness*: being true to the nature—to the kind—of oneself and others.

**212** *being generous*: “generosity,” “the cultivation of soil.” See the note to kural 81.

**214** *know kindness*: know and live in accordance with the nature of the world.

**215** *well*: literally, a body of water that serves a place where people dwell, as in a reservoir or village tank.

*Who love the world*: who love the people; who enact their love for the nature of the world.

**216** *good people*: people of grace, people of goodness, people who practice kindness. Contrast with kural 1008.

**217** *A tree granting remedies*: a tree whose every part becomes medicine.  
*great people*: people of great quality and virtue. Contrast with kural 1008.

**219** *way*: “way,” “path,” “river.”

*what is fitting*: that which is worth doing. In the Tamil, the word for this quality evokes as well the word for water.

**220** *generosity*: doing what is fitting.

## 23. GIVING

Chapters 22, 23, and 24 form a trio on different aspects of generosity. Parimēlaḷakar notes that while chapter 22 places the accent on this life, this chapter places the accent on the next.

**221** *Giving*: “giving one thing.” Giving the thing that is needed.

**223** *Giving*: giving to those who cry, “I have nothing.”

225 *the strong*: ascetics who have mastered their senses.

226 *ruinous hunger*: hunger that destroys a person's goodness.

227 *vicious*: "evil," "fiery."

228 *The joy of giving*: both to the one giving and the one receiving.

## 24. RENOWN

This chapter brings the section on householding to a close with the renown on earth that comes of generosity in a settled and upright life.

232 *giving what's needed*: "giving to those who ask."  
*those / Who speak*: implicitly, the wise.

236 *appear*: appear in this world, come into this world, be born as a human being in this world.

238 *Leaving a name*: as one leaves a legacy or progeny in the world.

239 *Beneath*: beneath the weight of.

240 *without name*: without inviting renown. *Without blame*: without incurring blame.

## III. RENUNCIATION

## 25. COMPASSION

The compassion of saints and ascetics. Parimēlaḷakar divides section III into two subsections, placing chapters 25–33 under the heading of "vows," "fasting," or "religious practice."

242 *it alone*: literally, "even if you examine [other paths], it alone." *Sees one to the end*: "is companion."  
*of every path*: of the many paths of different faiths and traditions.

243 *knows*: "has joined with."

245 *world*: implicitly, the good people of this world.

246 *lose everything but disdain*: "lose everything and forget." Implicitly, lose virtue and fall into forgetfulness that ends in disdain.

247 *No heaven without compassion*: "that world is not for those without

compassion.”

*no earth / Without wealth:* “this world is not for those without wealth.”

*wealth:* “things,” “possessions,” “meaning,” “substance.”

**249** *without wisdom:* “without clarity.”

**250** *Before those weaker:* implicitly, when you come in anger before those weaker.

## 26. REFUSING MEAT

Refusing meat as a principle for renunciants.

**252** *care:* protection, defense, safeguarding.

**253** *hearts:* “hearts,” “chest,” “minds.”

*no grace:* no turning toward goodness. *minds:* “minds,” “hearts.”

**254** *virtue:* goodness, meaning, sense.

**255** *lies:* endures.

**259** *fire:* sacrificial fire.

## 27. TAVAM

Austerities endured. The word comes from the Sanskrit word *tapas*, which also means “heat.” Tavam is the energy generated by acts of austerity.

**261** *form:* body, shape, figure.

**262** Unless it is already part of one’s nature, one’s tavam will be an empty gesture. One’s actions, however, can lead to its possibility and cultivation.

**263** *the others:* householders.

A key to this verse is the word “wanting.” Although giving is no doubt good, those who’ve let go have no need to be given to. They’ve gone beyond needing and not needing. That is why their tavam leads to release. Householders who desire to do something good are still attached to desire. But if they do their duty to be doing their duty, not in order to gain anything else, they too remember tavam—that tavam which is theirs to do.

**264** *if:* implicitly, one with tavam would not think these things.

**265** *in this life:* According to Parimēlaḷakar, “in this life” implies that what the renunciant seeks corresponds to the next life.

266 *their duty*: that which fits their station in life.

267 *Affliction*: “the burning and burning of affliction.”

268 *Those whose lives aren’t their own*: those beyond “me” and “mine.” This can also be translated, “Those who’ve attained mastery over their own lives.”

269 *attain*: “to join heads with.”

In this verse, there is a striking juxtaposition of the words for “head” and “hand,” as if to suggest that achieving tavam with the highest part of one’s body brings all possibilities to one’s hands.

## 28. UNWORTHY CONDUCT

“Conduct That Is Not Fitting,” “Conduct That Does Not Match.” Here, the conduct in question is conduct that does not fit tavam and the way of renunciation.

271 *heart*: heart-and-mind.

*within*: Even if others, without, believe one’s false conduct, the five senses within do not.

272 *To tower to the sky*: to appear to have a stellar reputation.

273 *command*: strength, self-control.

274 *wrong*: “what is not tavam.”

275 *make him cry out*: “make him suffer and cry out.”

276 *living by falsehood*: living off others.

277 *red rosary pea*: *Abrus precatorius*. A single pea ingested can kill a person.

278 *Plunging into the waters of greatness*: bathing and behaving like saints.

280 *the wise*: “the world.” See the note to kural 27. *shave*: shave one’s head.

## 29. FREEDOM FROM STEALING

*Stealing*: “stealing,” “deception.”

281 *heart*: heart-and-mind.

**282** *Even the thought*: “even thinking the thought with one’s heart-and-mind.”

*thieve*: “take by stealth.”

**283** *by stealth*: “by stealth,” “by stealing.”

*Declines utterly*: including whatever virtue one has gained.

**284** *in the end*: “in the ripening,” “in consequence.”

**285** *lapse*: lapse in another’s attention. The sense is of thieves who watch for their chance.

**286** *fit*: correspond to and embody, as water fits the land through which it flows. See the notes to chapter 14 and to kural 20 and 21. *what fits*: grace, measure, proportion, goodness.

**287** *darkness*: “the dark knowledge.”

*those knowing*: “those who aspired to and have gained.” *grace*: proportion, measure, goodness.

**288** *loves*: “knows.”

*grace*: proportion, measure, goodness. *deception* / *In*: “deception abides in.”

**289** *err*: “do what is not good,” “do what is not fitting,” “do what is out of proportion.”

**290** *Heaven*: “the world of the gods.”

*life*: here a phrase that could mean either “life that endures” or “the seat of life.” Maṇakkuṭavar interprets this as release itself. Parimēlaḷakar, on the other hand, interprets it as one’s body, yielding the sense “even bodies fail those who steal.”

### 30. TRUTH

**294** *lives* / *Without*: “learns to conduct oneself without,” “learns to flow in action without.”

**295** *stands above*: like the head above the body.

*generosity and tavam*: “those who enact generosity and tavam.”

**298** *without*: *puṛam*. In classical Tamil poetry, one of two main spheres of poetry and experience. *Puṛam* refers to the outer world of politics, economy, and war.

*within*: *akam*. In classical Tamil poetry, the other main sphere of poetry and experience. *Akam* refers to the inner world of the heart.

300 *truer*: “better,” “greater,” “more splendid.”

### 31. FREEDOM FROM ANGER

301 *guard*: watch, restrain, protect.  
*has sway*: as with those weaker than oneself.

303 *Bear anger toward none*: “forget anger with everyone.”

304 *joy and laughter*: Here we can see the distinction between the inner, *akam*, and the outer, *puram*. Joy is known inside; laughter appears outside. See also the note to kural 298.

306 *one’s teachers*: “one’s community,” “one’s friends,” “one’s associates.” All those able to help one cross the sea of birth.

307 *power*: substance, thing, meaning.

308 *scorched*: “wronged as if scorched.”

310 *sail beyond*: “renounce,” “let go of.”

### 32. DOING NO HARM

*Harm*: “unsweetness.”

311 *Even for*: “even if one could get.” Implicitly, such wealth cannot actually be had, since any apparent glory would be flawed.

312 *striking*: harming.

314 *wrongdoers*: “those who do harm.”  
*release them*: forgot both their act and one’s own.

315 *see*: consider, understand, regard.

316 *recognized*: understood, realized, experienced, felt.

317 *Highest of all*: “chief,” “head.” *anywhere*: “anytime.”

318 *the lives of others*: “lives that endure.”

320 *pain*: “all pain,” “all harm,” “all sorrow,” “all illness.”

### 33. FREEDOM FROM KILLING

322 *authors*: authorities on ethics.

*life*: “many lives,” “all lives,” “all beings.” *stands highest*: as the head above the body.

324 *a good way*: “a good way,” “the good way,” “the right way.” The word here for “way” also means “river.”

325 *stasis*: the state of being stuck in the round of rebirth.

326 *Life-ending*: “life-eating.”

327 *sweet life*: dear life.

328 *Does not suit*: “is last,” “is least,” “is lowest.”

*gained by virtue*: Parimēlaḷakar interprets this to mean the wealth gained by the householder through sacrifices to the gods.

#### 34. IMPERMANENCE

For Parimēlaḷakar, this chapter begins the second subsection within renunciation, chapters 34–37, “wisdom.”

336 *Here yesterday gone today*: “the man who was yesterday is not today.”

337 *think millions on millions of thoughts*: plan millions and millions of things.

340 *sheltered*: resting, snuggled. *Home*: “dwelling that one can enter.”

#### 35. RENUNCIATION

As both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakuṭavar note in their commentaries, what one renounces is attachment. Even living in a body and related to other things, the person who grasps nothing is free.

341 For Parimēlaḷakar, the repetition in this verse indicates multiplicity. One must let go of many, many things, whether all at once or one thing at a time.

342 *All that delights*: all that yields delight by being right and fitting.

346 *beyond gods*: “higher than the gods can reach.”

348 *touch heaven*: “attain the head,” “reach what is highest.” *Fall*: “succumb to delusion.”



### 36. KNOWING WHAT IS REAL

*What Is Real:* “truth,” “reality,” “soul,” “consciousness,” “body.”

**351** *Delusion:* “delusion,” “confusion,” “ignorance.”

*birth without light:* “birth without greatness,” “birth without splendor.”

**352** *delusion:* “delusion,” “confusion,” “ignorance.” *glory:* “joy,” “bliss.”

By extension, “freedom,” “release.”

**353** *delusion:* here, “doubt,” “uncertainty.”

**355** *kind:* nature, quality, property.

**356** *here:* in this world.

*reach:* “attain the head,” “reach what is highest.” *The path beyond here:* “the path that does not return here.”

**359** *severs all bonds:* “conducts oneself so that all bonds sever.”

### 37. SEVERING FROM DESIRE

**364** *Purity:* implicitly, salvation, release from the cycle of birth.

**365** *Those beyond desire:* “those who have severed from desire.” *are beyond:* “are said [by the wise] to have severed.”

**366** *fearing:* dreading, guarding against.

**367** *happen:* “come.”

*as hoped:* “in the way one desires,” “in the way one seeks.” The word here for “way” also means “river.”

**370** *in that moment:* in that state, then and there.

## IV. FATE

### 38. FATE

The last chapter of part 1 and the only chapter in the Tirukkural to have a section of its own.

**371** *wealth:* “wealth at hand.” Implicitly, “wealth that aids,” “wealth that is available for use.”

**373** *Innate knowledge:* as determined by fate.

**374** *two*: The fate that brings wisdom is different than the fate that brings wealth.

**375** *When gaining*: “in gaining wealth,” “in making wealth.”  
*all bad becomes good*: all once unfavorable becomes favorable. *All good becomes bad*: all once favorable becomes unfavorable. Both changes are changes in fate.

**378** *would go without*: would renounce. Since fate exempts no one, those with nothing seek to escape by having, not by renouncing. Implicitly, renunciation itself comes by fate.

**380** Nonetheless, see also kural 620.

## PART TWO WEALTH

This word, like this part of Tiruvalluvar’s book, encompasses a wide range of human experience. Its root meaning is “thing,” “matter,” or “entity” but extends to meanings such as “meaning,” “subject,” “learning,” and “wealth.” See also chapter 76.

The seventy chapters of part II fall into three sections: sovereignty (kurals 39–63), the arms of government (kurals 64–95), and other matters pertaining to politics and worldly life (96–108).

### I. SOVEREIGNTY

#### 39. THE SPLENDOR OF KINGS

“The Splendor of Kings,” “Splendor for Kings.” The qualities that make a true leader.

**381** *kingdom*: “family,” “people,” “community,” including the land itself.  
*highest*: the word here also means “bull” or “lion.”

**382** *energy*: diligence, enterprise, drive. *in fullness*: “without deficiency.”

**384** *honor*: “the honor of bravery,” “the honor of valor.”

**385** *makes*: “creates possibility.” *assigns*: allots, apportions, distributes.

**386** *easy to approach*: “easily seen.”

**387** *who cares / And gives*: “who is strong enough to care and give.”

**389** *bears*: withstands.

*bitter words*: Parimēlaḷakar reads this as the harsh but true words of a king’s advisors. See kurals 447 and 448.

**390** *kindness*: graciousness, compassion. *vigilance*: watchful of the people's welfare.

#### 40. LEARNING

That learning which pertains to a leader.

**391** *Faultlessly study*: study till all questions and uncertainties have been cleared.

*fit*: fit oneself to, live in accordance with.

**392** *lives with life*: living beings, living souls.

Just as two eyes provide a single vision with depth, so too do numbers and letters provide a clear view of the whole.

**394** *work*: labor, profession.

*meeting*: as clouds join together to shower rain.

**395** *the poor*: "those without." *the rich*: "those with."

The learned bow in humility before those who are rich in learning and thus continue to learn; those without such humility will always be low, no matter their outward standing.

**396** *well*: "a well in sand," "a well in sandy soil." *fills*: springs forth water.

*learns*: the word in Tamil implies digging, sharing its form with a word meaning "stone," "rock," or "gem." *a mind deepens*: "springs forth knowledge."

**398** *safeguard*: security, support, aid.

*all seven lives*: see the note to kural 62.

**399** *When the world takes delight*: "when they see the world delighting."

*love*: love of learning.

**400** One can see this kural as a commentary on all the other kural about wealth. Tiruvalluvar's book is not so much a collection as it is a constellation.

#### 41. LACK OF LEARNING

**401** *books*: "noble books," "books of fullness," "books that are full."

**402** *without breasts*: "without two breasts," "without both breasts."  
*womanhood*: womanliness, maidenhood, maidenliness.

408 *the good*: good people; people of knowledge.

When the learned meet poverty, that poverty does not ruin them. When the unlearned meet wealth, everyone suffers.

409 *born high*: born into a family of high rank. *born low*: born into a family of low rank.

## 42. LISTENING

The capacity to receive knowledge and wisdom from the words of others.

411 *Riches of the ear*: the knowledge one gains by listening to wise elders.

*highest*: “head,” “chief.”

412 *When the ear*: implicitly, only when the ear.

*a little*: as Parimēlaḷakar notes, too much given to the belly leads to discomfort and illness. The same is not true of the wisdom one hears.

413 *Fed through their fire*: “fed by offerings,” offered through fire. See also kural 259.

414 *holds one up*: “is a companion that supports one,” “is an aid that supports one.”

415 *the virtuous*: “those who possess conduct.”

417 *listen deeply*: “listen and reflect deeply.”

418 *entered them*: “penetrated one’s ears.”

419 *hard*: that is, impossible.

*to be humble*: to bow down, as in prayer. The phrase implies both humility of speech and humility of conduct.

420 As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, “What harm comes if they die, and what good if they live?”

## 43. THE POSSESSION OF KNOWLEDGE

Intelligence, wisdom, perception, learning.

421 *that falls to no enemy*: “that falls to no enemy,” “that no enemy can enter.”

422 *keeps the mind steady*: “keeps it from roaming where it roams.”

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this as the capacity of the mind not to dwell in the senses, not to go where the senses may go.

423 *discerning / Its truth*: “seeing its true substance,” “seeing its true meaning.”

425 *the wise*: “the world.” See the note to kural 27.  
*not blooming / And then drooping*: being constant, unlike a flower that blossoms and then wilts.

426 *the great*: “the world.” See the note to kural 27.

427 *foresee*: “know what comes,” “know what becomes.”

428 *work*: labor, profession. *knowing*: “those who know.”

430 *Having all*: “whatever they may have.”

#### 44. ELIMINATION OF FAULTS

Elimination of those faults that are not only detrimental in a leader but to which any leader may be particularly prone.

431 *depravity*: “smallness.” Commentators traditionally interpret this as “lust.”

432 *arrogance*: “pride without goodness.”

433 *seed*: “millet seed.” *tree*: “palmyra tree.”  
The same pairing appears in kural 104.

434 *treasure*: wealth, substance, meaning.

435 *guard beforehand*: implicitly, guard against faults.

436 *fault*: flaw, error, distress.

437 *do their duty*: “do what needs doing.”

438 *Unlike any other*: “not one to be counted among any others.”

439 *acclaim oneself*: be amazed at oneself. *What*: any deed that.

#### 45. GAINING THE HELP OF THE GREAT

Maṇakkuṭavar explains this as “gaining the help of those whose knowledge

is more mature than one's own." To be a king or leader of any kind, one must surround oneself with men and women of the highest caliber.

441 *study / And gain*: "know their qualities, select, and gain."

443 *As one's own*: as one's family, as one's closest associates.

444 *Moving with*: moving with as water moves. The word has the same root as "conduct."

445 *Counselors are eyes*: "one conducts oneself with counselors as one's eyes."

446 *right*: good, fitting, worthy.

447 *thunder*: reprove, rebuke, censure.

448 *thunders*: is able to reprove, rebuke, and censure.

449 *without principal*: "for one without principal." *permanence*: stability, standing.

*Without pillars*: "for one without pillars."

450 *earning foes*: "earning many foes."

#### 46. FREEDOM FROM SMALLNESS

"Not Joining with Those Who Are Small," "Not Fitting Oneself to Small-Minded Companions."

451 *smallness*: not of size, but of mind; baseness. *company*: family, kindred.

452 *nature*: "nature," "quality," "character."

*what we know*: one's knowledge, one's intelligence.

See kural 1323 for another image of land and water being changed in joining.

453 *knowledge*: perception, the capacity to know.

454 *Knowledge*: one's intelligence.

*appears of*: seems to come from, seems to arise from.

455 *rest / On*: depend upon, are upheld by.

456 *bestows goodness*: "leaves behind what is good," with "what is good"

often glossed as “children” or “legacy.” *Nothing that fails*: “no action that does not turn out good.”

457 *all life*: “life that endures,” “living beings.”

459 *good birth*: “the next life,” “joy in the next life” (Parimēlaḷakar), “reward in the next life” (Maṇakkuṭavar).

460 *bad*: evil. The word in Tamil also means “fire,” suggesting that bad company can burn.

#### 47. CLARITY BEFORE ACTION

461 *act*: including not acting when not acting is needed.

462 *with clear counsel*: who deliberate with carefully chosen counselors.

463 *possibility*: “capital,” “principal,” “cause,” “root,” “foundation.”

465 *rise up*: “rise up,” “rise upon,” “attack.”

466 *what is unworthy*: “what is not fit to be done.” *What is worthy*: “what is fit to be done.”

468 *many who care*: many who support, many who guard against failure.

469 *character*: quality, nature.

#### 48. KNOWING STRENGTH

471 *power*: “power,” “strength.”

472 *deed*: “movement,” “movement upon,” as in moving on an enemy.

474 *fit*: conduct oneself in accord with.

*flaunting/Himself*: “being amazed with himself.” See kural 439.

476 *keeps climbing*: “knows it and keeps climbing.”

477 *Give rightly knowing one’s limits*: “know one’s limits and give in the proper way,” “know one’s limits and give in the proper channel,” “know the limits of the river and give.”

478 *earning*: “the channel of increase,” “the river of becoming.”  
*spending*: “the channel of decrease,” “the river of going.”

479 *appears full*: “seems to exist.”

*falls completely*: “becomes nothing with no way to appear again.”

480 *Generosity*: “what is fitting.” See chapter 22.

#### 49. KNOWING TIME

481 *need time*: must know the right time for action.

486 *strength*: energy, drive.

488 *enemies*: enemies with force, mighty enemies.

490 *We find the same image seven centuries later in Avvaiyar's  
The Word That Endures*:

*Don't think to conquer the one who holds back, Concluding he  
must lack sense.*

*Perched on the sluicagate  
Letting the running fish run, the white crane Waits for the catch.*

*from Give, Eat, and Live: Poems of Avvaiyar*

#### 50. KNOWING PLACE

492 *a fortress*: one's own or that of another's.

493 *opponents*: “those who do not protect.”

494 *friends*: “those fitted together,” “those close.”

*in force*: with minds fitted together, with thoughts closely aligned. From the same root as the word here for “friends.”

497 *omits nothing*: omits nothing in thinking.

498 *a small place*: “a place fit for the leader of small armies.” *greatness*: “greatness,” “force,” “energy,” “drive.”

500 *The elephant ... without fear*: “the elephant whose eyes fear nothing.”  
*foes*: “spear-men.”

#### 51. KNOWING AND TRUSTING

Attaining clarity about and trusting those worthy to be trusted.

501 *Virtue wealth pleasure*: also the three parts of the Tirukkural.  
*pleasure*: one's understanding of and relationship to pleasure. *awe*:



fear and reverential wonder at life and death.

*these four / In depth*: “the quality of these four.”

*a king chooses*: “are chosen,” “must be chosen.” Implicitly, ministers are chosen, ministers must be chosen.

**502** *free of faults*: having removed oneself from faults.

*unwilling to risk shame*: shrinking from the shame of wrongdoing.

**504** *Take what is greatest*: select those in whom character outweighs faults most greatly.

**506** *Trust no one*: “guard against trusting anyone.”

*without ties*: without family (Parimēlaḷakar), without conduct (Maṇakkuṭavar).

**507** *fond trust*: trusting only on the basis of fondness.

**508** *trouble*: “unending trouble,” “inexhaustible trouble.”

## 52. KNOWING AND ENGAGING

**511** *Seeks*: desires, dwells in, brings forth.

**512** *fosters fecundity*: increases natural fertility and abundance. *increases increase*: increases revenue.

*engage*: engage in action, allow to serve.

**515** *endure action*: persevere in action.

**519** *one*: “the allegiance of one,” “the friendship of one,” “the liberties of one.”

*freely*: taking the liberties that friendship, trust, and knowledge bestow.

That capacity to listen which is the basis of relatedness and kindness.

*fully in action*: “those acting in action.” Those fully engaged in their work.

## 53. KINDNESS TO KINDRED

**521** *kin*: kindred, the circle of one’s family and relations. *Ties over time*: enduring relatedness.

**522** *If one has*: “if it happens that one has.”

*Wealth that flourishes*: “many kinds of wealth that never cease to flourish.”

**523** *moving*: intermingling, joining with one’s heart.

**524** *family*: kindred, the circle of one’s family and relations. *Flowing freely*: moving easily, as water flows.

**525** *family*: kindred, the circle of one's family and relations.

**527** *call and eat*: call and eat together, call and share food.  
*those*: only those.

**528** *Thrive in his sight*: "look to it and live," "look to it and thrive."

**530** *and welcome*: implicitly, if the study and reflection show the cause to be suspect, the king shouldn't extend his welcome.

## 54. ABSENCE OF MIND

**531** *neglect*: "negligence," "slackness."

**532** *having / To fill daily*: always having to fill one's belly by begging; poverty.

**534** *stronghold*: castle, fortress, protection.  
*refuge*: "that which is good." By extension, "abundance," "beauty," "health," "stability," "welfare."

**535** *fail*: forget, neglect, slip into negligence.

**536** *falls*: slips, neglects by forgetting.

**537** *with*: "with the tool of."

**538** *do*: "honor and act."  
*even seven births / Cannot atone*: "there is not even in seven births," "there is not even seven births." Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar take this as meaning "one has no goodness for seven births."  
*not doing*: "neglecting and not doing," "disdaining and not doing."

**540** *keeps thinking*: "is able to keep one's thoughts in mind."

## 55. GOOD RULE

*Rule*: from the word for "scepter," which in Tamil includes both the rod itself and a sense of goodness, fairness, and rectitude.

**541** *Regal with all*: impartial with all people. *clear-eyed*: without bias in one's vision.

**542** *sky*: implicitly, rain.  
*the justice of a king*: "a king's rule," "a king's scepter." Parimēlaḷakar: Even if the people have food, without justice it does no good.

543 *the books of priests*: the Vedas.  
*rest / On*: “start from and stand on.”

544 *great kings*: “kings of great lands.”

545 *abound*: “align,” “are in harmony.”

546 *bend*: fall prey to partiality.

547 *the world*: “all the world.”

548 *who sees no one*: “who cannot easily be seen.”

549 *task*: “task,” “work,” “labor.”

550 *Iniquity*: “those who do horrors.”

This verse may seem particularly harsh, especially juxtaposed against “Freedom from Killing.” What fits the king does not fit the saint. In the next chapter, Tiruvalluvar continues exploring the topic of “iniquity” but as applied to kings, not subjects. This verse thus serves as a hinge between the duties of good rule and the horrors of rule gone awry.

## 56. HARSH RULE

Rule that “bends” or “goes astray.” The word here for “harsh” shares the same root as the word for “iniquity” in kural 550. The line between justice and injustice in a king may be very fine indeed.

551 *torment*: torment their subjects.  
*accustomed to wrong*: “conduct themselves doing wrong.”

552 *demanding with a spear*: “like standing with a spear and saying give.”  
*begging*: asking one’s people for gifts.

555 *the hopeless*: “the helpless who suffer.” *force*: “force,” “army,” “tool,” “weapon.”

556 *light*: renown.

560 *the learned*: priests, Brahmins.

## 57. STRIKING NO FEAR

561 *what is fitting*: what is proper in response to injustice. *correcting*: punishing justly.  
*Completely*: so that the injustice in question does not occur again.

562 *wield*: raise one's weapon to strike. *discharge*: cast, hurl, launch.

563 *feared for his deeds*: “whose conduct leads to fearfulness,” “whose conduct leads to terror.”

564 *crumbles*: “his dwelling diminishes,” “his lifespan shrinks.”

565 *A ghost seems to hold his riches*: His wealth is useless to himself and others because no one wishes to stand beside him.

566 *lacks eyes*: lacks compassion. See the next chapter, “Eyes That Are Moved.”

567 *mettle*: capacity to overcome enemies.

569 *safety*: security, protection, defense.

570 *brings*: “brings,” “binds.”

## 58. EYES THAT ARE MOVED

The mercy and compassion of kings. The title of the chapter combines the word for “eye” with a word that means “movement,” “flowing,” “running,” or “current.”

571 *beauty*: “beauty,” “beautiful woman.” *of*: “that is,” “that is called.”

572 *has being*: moves, has nature, abides.  
*without it / Men*: “those without it.” Implicitly, kings without it.

574 *appearing*: “seeming to exist,” “seeming to be.” *in measure*: in just proportion.

576 *trees that are stuck in the ground*: Maṇakuṭavar interprets this phrase to mean “dolls made of wood and mud.”

577 *lacks movement*: “lacks eyes that are moved.”

578 *The virtuous king*: “the strong who never fail to do right.”

579 *in those*: “even in those.” *Nothing stands higher*: “head.”

580 *the poured poison*: Parimēlaḷakar interprets this as “the poison poured by familiars.”  
*kindness*: implicitly, the capacity of eyes to be moved.

## 59. ESPIONAGE

Following “Eyes That Are Moved,” another kind of seeing.

**581** *conscience*: morals, justice, goodness.

**582** *work*: labor, task, profession.

**583** *without spies*: “not spying with spies.”

*seeing what’s true*: seeing the import of what spies would tell.

**584** *those acting*: those acting on behalf of the king.

*those near*: those around the king, the king’s family. Parimēlaḷakar includes the king himself in this circle. *those far*: enemies.

**586** *cross*: “go past,” as in going past a border. *ascetic*: renouncer.

*yield / To nothing*: never flagging in keeping secrets, no matter what others may do.

## 60. HAVING ENERGY

**591** *energy*: the energy and enthusiasm for action.

**592** *volition*: the energy of mind, the energy of thought and resolve.

**593** *have energy*: “have energy steadily.”

*at hand*: see also the note to kural 371.

**596** *thought*: “all thought.” *Unachieved*: “having failed.”

*it achieves*: “is of the nature of not having failed.”

**597** *slacken*: become disheartened.

**599** *elephant immense and sharp-tusked*: one with strength and with means but without the energy for action.

**600** *Strength within*: sturdiness.

*are trees not men*: are trees that appear as men. Parimēlaḷakar notes that while trees lack the knowledge and capacity for action that belong to humans, men who are like trees cannot bring forth the good things that an actual tree can. Being a tree, in other words, is not the problem. The problem is not being fully what and who one is.

## 61. FREEDOM FROM SLOTH

**601** *sloth*: “the darkness that is sloth.”

- 602 *rise as family*: rise and prosper as a family of renown. *Proceeds*: “conducts oneself.”
- 603 *His family*: “the family that gave him birth.” *With*: “who conducts himself with.”
- 604 *strive*: “strive greatly,” “strive for great things.”
- 605 *vessel*: “these four form the vessel,” “these four form the boat.”
- 606 *Even with land*: even ruling land. *nothing great*: “no fruit that is great.”
- 607 *thunder*: thundering rebuke. See kurals 447 and 448. *strive*: “strive greatly.”
- 608 *One*: implicitly, a king.
- 610 *him who measured the worlds*: the god known as Trivikrama or Vamana who regained the universe from the demon king Bali by measuring it with three steps of his feet.

## 62. MASTERY OF ACTION

- 612 *the world*: the community of the learned and wise. See also the note to kural 27.
- 613 *Generosity*: “generosity,” “the cultivation of soil.”
- 614 *energy*: “the command of energy.”
- 615 *seeks*: loves.  
*family*: “one’s relatives,” “one’s kin.”
- 617 *Misfortune*: Lakshmi’s older sister, the goddess of misfortune. These sisters also appear in kural 167.  
*sloth*: the word in Tamil can also mean “waist,” as if to place the goddess of misfortune in the lap of the slothful. *fortune*: Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, “the one of the lotus.” *flower*: lotus.  
*energy*: “the energy of one without sloth.” The phrase can also be read as “the feet of one without sloth,” as if to suggest that fortune comes to the feet of those striving.
- 618 *luck*: fortune, fate, destiny.  
*having knowledge*: “knowing knowledge,” knowing what one should know.

619 *fate*: destiny, the gods.

620 *See the defeat of fate*: “see the backside even of fate.” Compare with kural 380.

### 63. NOT BEING DEFEATED BY ADVERSITY

621 *Triumphs*: “routs it,” “overcomes it,” “drives it away.”

622 *the flood / Of adversity*: “flood-like adversity.” *vanishes*: comes to ruin.

625 *by its waves*: “even if it comes one upon another.”

626 *grasp*: grasp, hoard.

629 *seeking*: “seeking,” “desiring.”

## II. THE ARMS OF GOVERNMENT

### 64. MINISTERS

This kural opens the second section of part II, “The Arms of Government,” kural 64–95. Maṇakkuṭavar further divides this section into several subsections, the first being “Ministers,” kural 64–73.

631 *action*: “great deeds,” “rare action.”

632 *protection*: “protection of the people.” *Perseverance*: “mastery of action.”

633 *divide*: create divisions among enemies.

*reunite*: restore relations with those who have broken away. *cherish and keep*: cherish and nurture one’s friendships and alliances.

636 *subtlety*: subtlety of an enemy. *last*: stand.

637 *action*: the ways of action.

638 *kills knowledge*: strikes down what one who knows says.

### 65. STRENGTH IN SPEECH

641 *Excellence*: goodness, strength, quality.

642 *weakness*: moral slackness.

643 *those listening*: friends, allies.  
*those / Not listening*: enemies, opponents.

644 *victory*: “wealth.” Achievement, attainment.  
*qualities*: one’s own qualities and the qualities of those listening  
(Parimēlaḷakar); the qualities of words (Maṇakkuṭavar).

645 *knowing*: only once one knows. *better*: defeat, refute.

646 *Growing love*: growing the desire to keep listening.

647 *hard*: that is, impossible.

649 *who can’t*: who lack the clarity to.

650 *learning*: “what they have learned,” “what they have studied.”

## 66. PURITY OF ACTION

*Purity*: faultlessness, truthfulness, holiness.

651 *True allies*: excellence of allies, goodness of allies. *true action*:  
excellence of action, goodness of action.

652 *Shun*: “shun,” “renounce.” *bears*: “bears,” “yields,” “renders.”

653 *light*: one’s present renown. *keep becoming*: become great.

654 *disgraceful*: “disgraceful,” “scornful,” “wretched.”

655 *regret*: “grieve saying ‘what have I done?’ “  
*Do not regret it*: “it is better not to regret it.” Implicitly, remedy one’s  
actions, rather than waste time wailing.

657 *far above*: “head,” “is head to.”

658 *Succeeding*: completing those actions spurned by the wise.

659 *Goodness*: “that which is good” “actions that are good.”  
*in time*: “after,” “afterward.”  
Maṇakkuṭavar: “All things gained by making others cry make ourselves  
cry.”

660 *an unfired pot*: “a pot made of fresh clay.”

## 67. FIRMNESS OF ACTION



*Firmness: resolution.*

661 *Firmness of action*: “what is called firmness of action.” *firmness of mind*: “one’s firmness of mind.”

663 *misery*: “unending misery.”

664 *hard*: rare, great.

665 *inspires the whole*: is acclaimed by all, is respected by all.

666 *steadfast*: steadfast in mind, steadfast in action.

667 *pin*: “axle pin.”

670 *when firm*: when otherwise firm. *be prized*: “be prized by the world.”

## 68. WAYS OF ACTION

674 *like remnants of fire*: like coals.

675 *out of darkness*: beyond confusion and doubt.

678 *A bull elephant*: “an elephant with wet cheeks,” indicating the secretion that appears on a male elephant’s cheeks during the period called *musth* when testosterone increases and the elephant’s behavior becomes aggressive.

679 *The sideless*: also interpreted as “enemies.” Literally, “those not united,” those not joined with or to others or oneself.

680 *small places*: small kingdoms. *aware of*: “alert to,” “fearful of.”  
*yield to*: submit to, incline to, seek the help of.

## 69. DIPLOMACY

681 *good lineage*: long-standing lineage, long-standing nativity to a place.

682 *strength in speaking true*: the capacity to listen and then speak, fitting one’s speech to circumstance.

683 *those*: “the nature of those who speak action,” the nature of diplomats, the nature of ambassadors. *conquerors*: “those bearing weapons.” Other kings.

684 *Wisdom*: natural wisdom, innate intelligence. *appearance*: “shape,”

“form,” “figure,” “grace.”

**686** *able to convey*: able to drive a matter home.

*perceiving / Each moment*: able to see what may grant victory in any moment.

**687** *Highest of all*: “head.”

*what is needed*: what duty requires.

**688** *A true envoy*: “the nature of an envoy,” “the nature of one who delivers with words.”

**689** *The fearless*: the strong of heart.

## 70. MOVING WITH KINGS

**691** *move*: conduct oneself in relation to.

**693** *misdeeds*: egregious failings. From the same root—“rare,” “difficult,” “choice”—as the word translated as “hard.” *guards*: guards against error, protects oneself.

*hard*: “hard for anyone,” “not possible for anyone.”

**694** *royalty*: “greatness,” “distinction.” *desist*: “conduct oneself to avoid.”

**696** *Take note*: take note of the king’s moods. *wait*: wait for the right time.

*What wants to be said*: what is gainful for the king to be said.

**697** *Speak what is gainful*: speak what is gainful, even if the king doesn’t listen (Parimēlaḷakar).

*Even when asked*: even if pressed by the king.

**698** *move*: conduct oneself in relation to. *light*: splendor, greatness, divinity. *that’s here*: that is the king’s own.

**700** *unkindness*: that which is unseemly, that which is not true to kind.

*old friendship*: long-standing friendship, generations of relatedness.

## 71. READING FACES “Knowing Signs,” “Taking Note.”

**701** *undying*: unchanging, undrying. *notes*: understands.

*the unsaid*: the unspoken thoughts of the king.

**702** *the heart*: the heart-and-mind, one’s inner thoughts and feelings.

*to the gods*: to a god, to divinity, to godliness.

**703** *who see behind faces*: “who understands inner thoughts through inner thoughts,” “who understands inner thoughts through outer gestures.” Parimēlaḷakar interprets this as understanding the movements of other minds by understanding the movements of one’s own.

*make them your own*: “bring them among your limbs,” “bring them among your organs,” “bring them among the elements of your kingdom.”

**704** *the same*: the same as others.

**705** *see behind faces*: see the note to kural 703.

**706** *The fullness of one’s heart*: “what is filling one’s heart,” “what is filling one’s mind.”

**708** *see within*: see and understand what is happening in one’s heart. Parimēlaḷakar extends this to being able to remedy what is lacking in one’s heart.

*It is enough to face them*: no words are needed. One need only to stand and be seen.

**709** *If one finds those*: should a king gain advisors.

## 72. KNOWING AN AUDIENCE

*Audience*: assembly, gathering of the learned.

**711** *words*: “the powers of words,” “the properties of words.” *with care*: having considered deeply, having given a matter ample thought.

**712** *the occasion*: the most suitable moment.

*with clarity*: having understood deeply, having come to clarity. *words*: “the ways of words,” “the ways words move.”

**713** *words*: “the powers of words,” “the properties of words.” *strength*: capacity, ability.

*those speaking*: “those endeavoring to speak.”

**714** *chalk*: white plaster, mortar. Although it does not produce light, it reflects it.

*simplicity*: simplicity of mind, tenderness. The word’s root suggests both the color white or plainness and a tree that lacks a solid inner core.

**716** *from grace*: from the way of virtue.

**719** *speak well*: “convey well,” “deliver well,” “drive matters home.”

*before the wise*: among the wise, in the assembly of the wise. *before the little*: among the little, in the assembly of the little.

**720** *Ambrosia*: as in kural 11 and 64, the nectar of the gods that yields eternal life.

### 73. NOT FEARING AN AUDIENCE

*Audience*: assembly, gathering of the learned.

**721** *They never falter*: “their mouths never slacken,” “their mouths never fail.”

*ways*: both the ways of an audience and the ways one can falter. *words*: “the powers of words,” “the properties of words.”

**722** *convey*: “convey,” “deliver,” “drive home.”

**723** *battlefield*: “the place of enemies.”

**724** *attain*: “take to heart,” “learn.”

*those greater*: those greater in learning.

**725** *The art of argument*: “the way of measure.” Maṇakkuṭavar interprets this to mean knowing the measure of books, which he divides into four kinds: books that investigate the nature of truth, books of scripture and holy writ, books on agriculture and economics, and books on law and warfare.

**726** *wise listeners*: “a discerning assembly,” “an audience of subtlety.”

**730** *gone*: “as good as gone.” Equal to the dead. *the hall*: the court, the assembly. *learning*: “what they have learned.”

### 74. COUNTRY

Maṇakkuṭavar groups kural 74–75 into a subsection on the nature of economy and wealth.

**731** *union*: “the uniting,” “the coming together.” Country as a dynamic and living harmony.

*yields*: harvests.

*untarnished*: “untarnished,” “unflagging.” *people / Of wisdom*: people whose character is fitting, proportional, and good.

**732** *flourishing*: “thriving,” “yielding.” Country as a continual giving forth.

*wealth*: “great wealth,” “boundless wealth.”

735 *outlaws*: “deadly outlaws,” “outlaws that kill.”

737 *safety*: a strong fortress, a fortified capital.

740 *if everything fits*: if a country has all the necessary qualities.

## 75. FORTRESSES

742 *shining water*: “jewel-like water.” Sources of water that never go dry, even under the bright summer sun.

*stunning*: “beautiful.” Implicitly, dangerous.

743 *Authorities*: “books.” Authors, experts. *safety*: fortress. The word in Tamil means both.

744 *with little to defend*: with few or no vulnerable points. *enemies*: “besieging enemies,” “attacking enemies.”

745 *hold*: stand firm, remain strong.

747 *besiege*: encircle.

*storm*: “attack without encircling.” *deceit*: treachery within.

## 76. THE MAKING OF WEALTH

751 *wealth*: “substance,” “learning,” “meaning,” “thing.”

*worthless*: “without substance,” “without learning,” “without meaning,” “nothing.”

*worthy*: “of substance,” “of learning,” “of meaning,” “something.”

753 *darkness*: often interpreted as “enmity” or “enemies.” *unfailing*: “unfailing,” “undying,” “truthful,” “true.”

754 *pleasure*: love.

*aright*: “knowing the right method,” “knowing the proper way.”

756 *wealth claimed*: wealth that lacks heirs and thus comes to the king.

757 *mercy*: grace, compassion. See chapter 25.

760 *one who is solid in wealth*: one who makes wealth that is solid like the core of a great tree.

*wealth that shines*: glorious wealth, virtuous wealth, wealth that does not shrink in substance or stature. *The other two*: virtue and love.

## 77. THE SPLENDOR OF ARMIES

“The Splendor of Armies,” “Splendor for Armies.”

**761** *highest*: “chief,” “head.”

*Full of all force*: complete and composed of all necessary components.

**762** *long lineage*: tradition, generations of experience.

**763** *rats*: “an army of rats.”

**764** *carried / Through time*: born of generations of experience.

**765** *death*: the god of death.

**766** *assurance*: the support and approval of the king.

**767** *Advancing fully in force*: setting out full-fledged, regaled in garlands.  
*withstanding / Advances*: “having learned how to withstand an army’s advances.”

**768** *glory*: splendor. An army may triumph by appearance alone.

**769** *smallness*: shrinkage, desertion.

*ceaseless aversion*: the state of mind leading to rape and looting, scorned by kings.

## 78. THE VALOR OF WARRIORS

*Warriors*: “Warriors,” “Troops,” “Forces.”

**771** *stone*: memorial stone.

**773** *the fallen*: those in danger.

**774** *his spear*: “the spear in his hand.” Since the spear he had in his hand is gone, he searches for another and is delighted to find one sticking out of his body.

**776** *Battle wounds*: wounds to the chest or face.

**777** *fame*: “fame that spreads.”

*the band / Of a warrior*: the metal anklet worn by a warrior.

**778** *fear death*: “fear for their lives in danger,” “fear for their lives in battle.”

*do not shrink*: do not shrink in their nature, do not shrink in their greatness.

780 king: “the one who protects,” “the one who preserves.”

## 79. FRIENDSHIP

Maṇakkuṭavar groups kurals 79–83 into a subsection on the nature of friendship.

781 *friendship*: given its context in this verse, this chapter, the chapters that follow, and the book as a whole, we can see that Tiruvalluvar is referring specifically to the friends and allies of the king. And yet, as with so many of the book’s verses, that very specificity flows outward.

*against foes*: “against actions.” Implicitly, against the actions of foes.

782 *wise souls*: people of wisdom, people of goodness. The word here for wisdom in Tamil not only means “quality,” “wisdom,” and “goodness” but also, revealingly, “water.”

783 *relating to*: “relating to,” “moving with.”

784 *thunder*: see kurals 447, 448, and 607.

785 *presence*: continual interaction in person.

*birth*: affiliation by birth into the same community or country. *right*: the liberties afforded by friendship.

787 *When / Trouble comes*: if trouble that cannot be averted, as from a god or from fate, appears.

*stays*: shares in the suffering.

788 *a garment as it slips*: the image implicit in the original is of a garment that has been wrapped and tied around the body and is starting to come loose.

789 *unwavering*: “unwavering,” “unhesitating.” *Support*: “grounded solidity.”

*in all ways*: “in every way possible.”

790 *Saying*: “saying,” “extolling,” “praising,” “adorning with speech.”

## 80. EXAMINED FRIENDSHIP

791 *Friends*: “those who embody friendship,” “those who have mastered the art of friendship.”

*cannot flee*: “there is no leaving,” “there is no release.”

793 *undying* / *Relations*: “the undiminishing community,” “undiminishing relations.” The entire circle of extended family to which one becomes joined in friendship.

794 *Even by giving*: even by giving something they need; even with gifts.

795 *scorn*: “thunder.”

*Bring tears*: speak so as to bring tears of remorse. *set right*: impart knowledge of the right path.

796 *It measures*: “it is a rod that measures.” *torment*: misfortune, ruin. *merit*: benefit, decisive strength.

797 *avoiding*: “avoiding and having nothing to do with.” In the Tamil, Tiruvalluvar stretches the last vowel sound in the word for “avoid,” as if to show how far one must go.

798 *flees*: “cuts from the way.”

*shrinks heart*: diminishes effort, kills enthusiasm, reduces clarity of thought.

799 *it burns*: “its memory burns the heart.”

800 *the unfit*: “the friendship of those unfit,” “those out of harmony with the world” (Parimēlaḷakar), “those not equal to one” (Maṇakkuṭavar).

## 81. LONG FRIENDSHIP

801 *liberty*: the right to act even without asking in advance and to do even what a friend may not like.

This verse takes the accent off time and places it instead on freedom (Parimēlaḷakar).

802 *duty*: “duty,” “responsibility,” “nature.” *wisdom*: “the wise.”

803 *cannot take*: cannot stand, cannot abide (Parimēlaḷakar).

804 *the great*: the wise, the knowing. The ones who “take them with pleasure” are unspecified in the Tamil, but as Parimēlaḷakar notes of Tiruvalluvar, “Since only the wise would take pleasure in knowing such things have happened, he is speaking of them.” *Take them with pleasure*: take them as desirable, even if the great wouldn’t otherwise desire them.

805 *If a friend offends*: “if friends do something that is painful.”



**806** *friends in friendship*: friends who remain true to the bounds of friendship.

*Faithful over time*: true to long friendship.

**807** *who love friends*: “whose friendship has come by love.”

**808** *free*: “strong in the liberty,” “able to take the liberty.” *Not to hear*: not to listen to talk of.

**809** *The wise*: “the world.” See the note to kural 27.

**810** *those / Who don't love them*: implicitly, enemies.

## 82. HARMFUL FRIENDSHIP

**811** *goodness*: “goodness,” “character,” “quality,” “nature.”  
*seem essential*: seem entirely lovable. Literally, “seem like those who drink,” “seem like those who devour,” as in seeming to be absorbed or immersed in friendship.

**813** *lovers for pay*: “takers of what's given,” “receivers of what's gained.” Implicitly, those who take money for love.

**816** *grasping*: thick, smothering, all-embracing.

**818** *those insisting the possible is impossible*: those who refuse to help when they can.

**819** *whose words and deeds never meet*: “whose words are one thing, deeds another.”

**820** *harsh in public*: publicly dismissive, publicly berating.

## 83. FALSE FRIENDSHIP

**821** *to be struck*: “to be struck when the best moment appears.”

**822** *of two minds*: who appear to be one way but are thinking another. Contrast with kural 974.

**823** *Do not become*: “rarely become,” “hardly become,” so rare and so hard as to be virtually impossible.

**824** *hearts / That scowl*: “hearts that do not smile,” “hearts that do not laugh.” Hearts that intend harm.

**825** *do not meet*: do not correspond with, achieve no harmony with.

**826** *One knows quickly*: “one knows quickly,” “one must realize quickly.”

**828** *hands in prayer*: prayerful hands; hands with palms pressed together, as in worshipful greeting.

**829** *delighting*: “doing things that bring delight.” *feign love*: make a great show of friendship.

**830** *not heart*: “cast out friendship within,” “keep friendship out of one’s heart.”

#### 84. FOLLY

Maṇakkuṭavar groups kural 84–95 into their own subsection on the nature of hardship and suffering.

**832** *unfit/For one’s hands*: unfit for one’s station, unfit for one’s way in the world.

**833** *work*: “work,” “task,” “labor,” “profession.”

**834** *advises*: “advises others,” “preaches to others.”

**835** *seven lives*: see the note to kural 62.

**836** *without skill*: “without hands that know,” “without knowing the proper way.”

**837** *fortune*: “great fortune,” “great wealth.”

**840** *wise company*: the assembly of the wise.

#### 85. PRESUMPTION

“Being Ruled by Paltry Knowledge.”

**841** *wisdom*: “the world.” The community of the learned and wise.

**842** *tavam*: in the sense of past good action yielding fruit in the present.

**843** *hard*: that is, impossible.

**845** *pretending / To*: “conducting oneself as if possessing.”

846 *exposed*: visible because uncorrected. *Puts on a fig leaf*: “hides nakedness.”

847 *wise counsel*: “rare knowledge,” “precious teachings.”

848 *nor see for themselves*: nor see for themselves the right course of action.

*plague*: a plague the earth can scarcely bear (Parimēlaḷakar).

849 *the sightless*: not the blind but those refusing to see.

## 86. DISCORD

851 *unnatural division*: “the division that is the lack of true nature,” “the division that is the lack of quality,” “the division that is the lack of character.”

*all lives*: all living beings.

852 *Highest*: “chief,” “head.”

853 *light*: renown.

*disease*: “woeful disease.”

857 *The bitter*: those of malicious knowledge who bring harm to themselves and others.

860 *bitterness*: afflictions, evils. *peak*: pinnacle, wealth, exultation.

## 87. SPLENDOR FOR ENEMIES

“Splendor for Enemies,” “The Splendor of Enemies.”

861 Compare with kural 250, addressed to renunciants.

862 *enemies*: “the strength of enemies.”

863 *friendless*: “one without associations.” Unable to connect with others.

864 *Easy*: easy to take.

*Who cannot keep secrets*: “who has no fullness.” Who cannot remain filled with what one knows and is not meant to be shared.

865 *seek no way*: do not follow the way of goodness and virtue. *all chances*: all opportunities to enact goodness and virtue.

866 *hostility*: “lack of welcome,” “lack of care,” “lack of protection.”  
*hosted*: “hosted,” “welcomed.”

868 *virtue*: character, quality, nature.

869 *Joy*: the joy of victory.

870 *fools*: “those who have not studied,” “those who have not learned.”

## 88. KNOWING AN ENEMY

871 *kindlessness*: “lack of nature.” Not being true to kind.

872 *those who plow with bows*: kings.

873 *Madder*: “poorer,” as in poorer in reason and knowledge.

874 *kindness*: being true to kind, being true to one’s nature. *Lives*: “lives,”  
“endures,” “persists,” “exists.”  
*light*: “greatness,” “excellence,” “quality.”

875 *alone*: “without friends,” “without support.” *a dear friend*: “sweet support.”

876 *Whether trusted or not*: implicitly, in times without trouble. *one*:  
implicitly, an enemy.

877 *nor woes*: “nor speak of one’s woes.”

878 *Perceive*: perceive one’s situation.

879 *cut*: “kill.”

880 *One breath*: “one only breathes.”

## 89. ENEMIES WITHIN

“Enemies Within,” “Inner Enmity.”

881 *become bitter*: become hateful. *when bitter*: when bringing disease.

882 *fear enemies*: “fear bonds with enemies.”

884 *Great misery*: many causes for misery and discord.

886 *If oneness disappears*: if discord appears, if enmity appears.

887 *fit nothing*: both fit nothing themselves and fit no one else.

888 *it*: “its strength.”

889 *seed*: “sesame seed.”

## 90. NOT SCORNING THE GREAT

891 *might*: Parimēlaḷakar describes this as the power to carry out whatever one begins.

892 *great suffering*: “unending suffering,” “irremediable suffering.” *from the great*: see kural 29 on the powers attributed to ascetics. *failing to respect*: “conducting oneself without respecting.”

893 *those above*: “the strong,” “the mighty.” See the note to kural 891 on “might.”

In this translation I follow Maṇakkuṭavar’s interpretation. Parimēlaḷakar, by contrast, interprets the verse this way:

*If one seeks death heed no advice and scorn Those able to destroy*

894 *summoning*: “beckoning with one’s hands.” *death*: the god of death.

895 *cruel*: “cruel,” “severe,” “mighty,” “burning.”

896 *recover*: “escape.”

*Who scorn*: “whose conduct scorns.”

The commentator Paritīyar likens the first kind of recovery to the way a tree’s roots may escape from a fire to bring forth new shoots in time.

897 *What good are*: “what good is a life of.”

898 *to tower*: “to have standing on earth.”

899 *the highest in virtue*: those of the highest principles, those of the highest vows; saints, ascetics.

900 *allies*: “allies,” “support,” “protection.”

## 91. YIELDING TO WIVES

This chapter may appear particularly at odds with modern sensibilities, but one may use it to explore not the question of wives (or of any other kind of beloved) but the nature of yielding, craving, fearing, and following.

901 *No virtue in:* no goodness arises from.

902 *without care:* without regard for goodness and virtue.

903 *losing / Oneself:* “stooping and losing one’s own nature.”

904 *glory:* “the next life.” Glory in the next life.

*Gains no mastery of deeds:* attains no praise for his actions in this life.

906 *bamboo shoulders:* shoulders and arms that are even and smooth to the touch.

907 *servility:* “servility to one’s wife,” “conduct always deferring to one’s wife.”

908 *follow:* defer always to.

*wives’ brows:* “she with a good brow,” “she with a beautiful brow.” A traditional Tamil epithet for a beautiful woman.

909 *virtue:* “virtuous deeds,” “acts of virtue.” *wealth:* “great wealth.”

*pleasure:* “the remaining action,” the third in this set of three.

910 *mind:* heart-and-mind.

*in place:* in its proper place, in its proper state. This also carries the sense of prosperity, the result of being at work. *at work:* at one in one’s work. Literally, “with one’s heart joined with one’s thoughts.”

## 92. LIMITLESS WOMEN

The word here in Tamil for “limit” can mean “limit,” “measure,” or “marriage.” The title thus implies “courtesan” or “prostitute.” However, the focus of the chapter isn’t so much on these women as on the men who seek them out.

911 *well-bangled women:* “those of choice bangles.” Here a term of praise becomes a wry comment on motivation.

912 *heartless:* “without quality,” “without nature,” “without character.”  
*heart:* quality, nature, character.

913 *gripping:* “embracing,” but in the sense of one taking care of dead bodies, gripping and carrying whatever their duty requires.  
*Some corpse:* “some unknown corpse.”  
*in the dark:* “in a dark room.”

915 *The wise:* those of cultivated intelligence.

*good minds*: natural intelligence.

917 *hearts*: hearts-and-minds.

918 *Without sense*: “who do not discern,” “who do not look into things.”

919 *arms*: “soft arms,” “delicate arms.” *jewels*: “fine jewels,” “excellent jewels.”

*heedless men*: “heedless reprobates,” “heedless scoundrels.”

920 *fortune*: the goddess of fortune.

*of two minds*: Contrast with kural 974.

### 93. NOT DRINKING

The specific drink referred to in this chapter is toddy—palm wine—which stands for alcohol more generally.

921 *Drowning in drink*: “conducting themselves always in love with drink.” The Tamil phrase contains the word meaning “to conduct” or “to flow,” suggesting that love of drink causes one’s life to flow out of one’s control.

924 *vile*: “great and despised.”

925 *to be out of one’s head*: “to not know one’s body,” “to not know the truth.”

*way*: “hand,” in the sense of what fits a person’s hands to do. Right conduct.

928 *No use saying*: “give up saying.”

*hidden*: “hidden in one’s heart-and-mind.”

929 *Arguing with*: “showing reasons to,” “giving reasons to.”

### 94. DICE

Gambling.

931 *dice*: playing at dice.

932 *players*: “dice players.”

933 *roll away*: “end up away,” “end up outside.” Parimēlaḷakar interprets this to mean “end up in the hands of enemies.”

*roll dice*: “call the rolling dice.”

935 *dice hands*: skill at dicing.

936 *bellies never fill*: in this life. *torments torment them*: in the next life.  
*woe*: the goddess of misfortune, Lakshmi's older sister. *of dice*: "that is dice."

937 *to the table*: "to the dice hall." *old wealth*: ancestral wealth.

938 *makes a person a lie*: "makes one take up falsehood."

939 *takes to tables*: "takes up dicing." *light*: renown.

## 95. MEDICINE

Both the practice of medicine and what serves as medicine.

941 *too little or too much*: traditionally interpreted in one of two ways.  
The first sees "too little" and "too much" as referring to the trio of elements directly. An imbalance among them, in this view, is what causes disease. The second sees "too little" and "too much" as referring to such things as food, sleep, or activity. In this second view, lack or excess of any of these things is what causes the three elements in turn to cause disease.  
*the trio / With wind*: wind, bile, and phlegm.  
*named by authors*: named by authorities, named by the authors of traditional medical texts.

942 *eats*: "takes care to eat."  
*after digestion*: "after what was eaten is gone."

943 *knowing one's limits*: knowing the right measure of food for one's body.

944 *hunger*: "great hunger," "complete hunger."

946 *moderation*: Parimēlaḷakar describes this as "eating a little less than could be eaten."

947 *fire*: the heat of digestion.

949 *Time*: time, season, moment.  
*doctors*: singular in the original, "the one who has studied."

950 *preparer*: both the one who makes the medicine and the one who gives it.



## 96. LINEAGE

This kural opens the third and final section of part II, kural 96–108. *Lineage*: traditionally interpreted to mean “birth in a noble family,” but as Tiruvalluvar himself suggests, this is a more complicated matter than it may at first appear.

951 *born to a home*: traditionally interpreted to mean “born to a noble family.” However, it is equally possible to understand the word “home” in a more wide-ranging sense and to recognize that a person may be born in many ways. See kural 960 or kural 973 in the chapter on greatness. *morality*: “morality,” “integrity,” “ethics,” “uprightness.”

953 *cheer*: cheerfulness, laughter, a smile.

954 *Do nothing demeaning*: take no action that would demean themselves. Those who take such actions call into question the nature of their family and birth.

955 *Does not fall from*: “does not fall from,” “does not depart from.” The phrase in Tamil combines “head” and “separating,” as if to suggest a head coming loose from a body, or losing one’s sense of direction.

956 *family*: “family,” “lineage,” “community,” “tradition.” A different word than in kural 952–955.

957 *the bright moon above*: “the moon shining prominently in the sky.”

958 *the birth / Of a man*: a man’s birth in his family, lineage, community, and tradition.

959 *reveal the soil*: “reveal what lies in the soil,” “reveal the nature of the soil.”  
*words spoken*: “words from one’s mouth.”

960 *family*: “family,” “lineage,” “community,” “tradition.”

## 97. HONOR

Parimēlaḷakar classifies honor among the qualities belonging to those of a lineage. That is why, in his view, this chapter follows the previous one.

961 *diminishes*: implicitly, diminishes honor.

964 *hair fallen from one's head*: of no account. *place*: “place,” “station,” “state,” “status.”

965 *the most minuscule diminishment*: “a diminishment the size of a kuṇḍri seed,” the kuṇḍri seed being very small. *Mountains*: “those like mountains.”

966 *name*: renown in this life.

967 *standing*: true to one's standing, remaining in one's station.

968 *guarding*: “living by guarding.”  
*remedy*: “remedy,” “medicine,” “ambrosia.” Remedy against death.

969 *the deer that dies / If one hair gets lost*: a mythical deer that dies if it loses even one hair.

970 *Worships*: “worships,” “praises.”

## 98. GREATNESS

The qualities of greatness.

971 *Aspiration*: “aspiration,” “abundance,” “exuberance,” “drive.” The same word is translated in kural 600 as “strength overflowing.”  
*glory*: light, renown.

972 *born / Of great deeds*: “stemming from the difference in action undertaken.” See also kural 26, to which Parimēlaḷakar makes reference throughout his commentary to this chapter.

973 *even high*: even located above. *Even low*: even located below.

974 *one mind*: integrity. Contrast with kural 822 and 920. *ruling oneself*: “conducting oneself with care.”

975 *the impossible*: “those actions that are rare,” “those actions that are difficult.” See kural 26.  
*Rightly and fully*: in the proper way.

976 *know*: “know,” “experience,” “feel.” *desire*: “aim,” “aspiration.”

977 *insolent action*: action beyond bounds.

978 *adores*: “is amazed by.”

980 *shields failings*: conceals the shortcomings of others, speaking of their virtues instead.

## 99. INTEGRITY

The command of noble qualities realized in abundance (Parimēlaḷakar).

981 *what fits*: what matches, what suits, what is natural for a particular person and situation. The word here in Tamil is often translated as “duty” but here refers not to a duty that is externally imposed but to an order discovered in the very nature of things.

*natural*: the same word translated in the first line as “what fits.” Here, too, everything good—every good quality—comes not from an external sense of duty but from an inner sense of Tightness and what fits a particular person and situation.

982 *Goodness*: “goodness,” “excellence,” “beauty,” “quality.” *good* / *Beyond all other goods*: “no other good can be called good.”

983 *kindness*: see chapter 22 and the note to kural 211. *bedrock*: “bedrock,” “mainstay,” “pillar,” “support.”

984 *Tavam*: see chapter 27.

*not killing*: “the good of not killing.”

*not speaking ill*: “the good of not speaking ill.”

985 *with it*: “it is the tool with which,” “it is the weapon with which,” “it is the force by which.”

986 *Even against unequals*: in the same manner against one’s inferiors as against one’s superiors (Parimēlaḷakar).

987 *those not doing good*: those who wrong one.

988 *strength*: “strength,” “power,” “solidity,” “certainty.” *Poverty*: “not having,” “lack,” “want.”

989 *time*: “time,” “eon,” “age,” “world.”

990 *lose their integrity*: “shrink in their integrity.”

## 100. HAVING KINDNESS

*Kindness*: “Kindness,” “Nature,” “Quality,” “Character.” Throughout this translation, the word “kindness” has been used to render several different but related words in Tamil. In this chapter, “kindness” refers not simply to the sense of being helpful or gentle but also to the deeper and root sense in English of being true to kind—being true to one’s nature—and acting

accordingly. See also kural 874.

**991** *openness to all people*: being approachable to everyone. See also kural 386.

*the practice / Of kindness*: “the practice that is called having kindness.” One can also translate “practice” as “way.”

**992** *the way of kindness*: “the way that is called having kindness,” “the practice that is called having kindness.”

**993** *in limbs*: in body, in outward form.

*kindness overflowing*: “kindness that abounds,” “a nature that abounds,” “qualities that abound.”

**994** *the world*: the community of the learned and wise. *their kind*: their nature, their quality.

**995** *The kind*: “those who know nature,” “those who know qualities.” Those who know the natures and qualities of others.  
*remain kind*: remain filled with the qualities of kindness.

**997** *as sharp*: as keen in perception and intellect. *without human kindness*: without human qualities. *are blocks of wood*: lack all human sense.

**998** *wrong*: “what is not good,” “what is not loving.” *last*: least in virtue, most unfitting.

**999** *those who cannot smile*: “those who cannot smile,” “those who cannot laugh,” “those who cannot move happily with others.” The result of lacking kindness.

**1000** *milk*: “good milk.”

*by its jug*: “by the fault of its jug,” “by the impurity of its jug.”

## 101. FRUITLESS WEALTH

**1001** *gathered*: with the sense of filling up one’s place or house. *without tasting it*: without partaking of it, without enjoying it.

**1002** *grasping*: “grasping without giving.”

*ugly*: “without excellence,” “without greatness,” “without dignity.” Morally ugly.

**1003** *hungry*: rapacious.

**1004** *One no one loves*: one with wealth who gives nothing to anyone.

**1005** *billions*: billions on billions.

**1006** *give*: “give something,” “give anything.” Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as saying that the one who won’t enjoy his wealth and give something to the worthy is a disease to his wealth, since he prevents it from fulfilling its nature.

**1007** *great goodness*: great goodness and beauty without and within.

**1008** *one unloved*: one with wealth who gives nothing to anyone in need, even if they live right beside him. See also kurals 216, 217, and 1004.

*square*: “in the center of the village,” “in the center of the town.”

**1009** *all wealth*: “shining wealth,” “splendid wealth,” “beautiful wealth.”  
*Without ... enjoyment*: “by suppressing oneself,” “by blocking oneself,” as one might block the flowing of water.

**1010** *rain*: “rain,” “water,” “clouds.”

## **102. HAVING MODESTY**

*Modesty*: the word in Tamil can also be translated as “shame,” but it is the disposition against doing anything shameful rather than the experience of shame itself.

**1011** *Modesty in action*: disposition against doing anything shameful.  
*brows*: see the note to kural 908.

**1012** *such*: “the rest.” The other key elements of life.

**1013** *bodies*: “flesh.”  
*integrity*: “integrity,” “goodness,” “virtue,” “excellence.”

**1014** *pride*: “a proud gait.” *affliction*: disease.

**1015** *fear*: shrink from, would be ashamed by. See kural 428. *shame*: see the chapter note.  
*the wise*: “the world.”

**1016** *want*: “want,” “seek,” “desire,” “cherish.” *The wide world*: the astonishing world.

**1018** *Virtue itself feels shame*: virtue, ashamed, abandons him.

**1019** *family*: “family,” “lineage,” “community,” “tradition.”

**1020** *modesty*: “modesty within,” “modesty in their hearts.” *puppets*: “wooden dolls.”

### 103. SERVING FAMILY

“Ways of Family.” The ways that allow a family to thrive.

**1021** *in action*: that has begun an action.

*I won't ever cease*: “I won't rest my hand.” I won't cease till I've completed that action.

**1022** *Mastery of action*: see chapter 62.

*thriving*: “thriving in action,” “thriving in deeds.”

**1023** *sets forth*: “comes forward.”

**1024** *success*: the successful completion of one's aims. *Obtains*: happens of its own accord.

**1025** *the wise*: “the world.” The community of the learned and wise.

**1026** *To command*: “to take command of.” To raise up one's family.

**1027** *those able*: those able to act.

**1028** *Dally in pride*: “delay and think of one's honor.” *it's gone*: one's family falls.

**1029** *are they only / Vessels for suffering*: implicitly, no. These bodies are vessels for greatness.

**1030** *upright*: “upright,” “standing.”

### 104. FARMING

“Plowing” but encompassing all the arts of agriculture.

**1031** *Turn as it will*: no matter where the world may turn. *the world*: the community of the learned and wise. *highest*: chief, head.

**1032** *pin*: linchpin.

*world*: “the people of the world.”

**1033** *honor them for food*: “honor and eat,” “praise and eat.” Depend on them for their lives.

**1034** *many shelters*: “the shade of many umbrellas.” The umbrella here stands for the king’s umbrella, which grants cooling shade to his subjects. Hence, implicitly, many kings.

*their king’s shelter*: “their umbrella.” Their king’s umbrella. *Those whose fields shelter grain*: “those with the quality of shade who have grain.” Those growing grain who are gracious and generous. Maṇakkuṭavar describes them as “those who have shade without umbrellas,” noting that, along with supporting themselves, farmers can also make their kings thrive.

**1035** *He who eats*: “he whose nature is to eat.”

**1036** *fold their arms*: fold up their hands, refuse to work. *I need nothing*: “I’ve renounced all desiring.”

**1037** *dries it*: leaves it to dry, leaves the land fallow. *flourishes*: yields abundantly.

**1038** *Better than*: more important than. Plowing and water, though, still remain good.

*watching*: “watching,” “protecting,” “guarding.”

**1039** *husbandman*: the word in Tamil means “farmer,” “husband,” and “lord.” For an exploration of the meanings of “husbandman” in English and its relation to a similar system of analogies that connect agriculture, marriage, and the sacred, see the work of Wendell Berry and his essay “Discipline and Hope,” first published in *A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural*.

*stays away*: does not visit it, does not walk it.

## 105. WANT

“Want,” “Destitution.” In Parimēlalakar’s definition, the utter absence of anything to enjoy or experience.

**1041** *want*: “having nothing.”

**1042** *Want*: “having nothing.”

**1043** *loveliness*: beauty in body, speech, and standing.

**1044** *born to a family*: see chapter 96. *want*: “having nothing.”

*despair*: the slackness of energy that leads to negligence. **1046** *know*: understand fully.

**1048** *lack*: “lack,” “poverty,” “penury,” “destitution.”

**1049** *poverty*: “poverty,” “lack,” “penury,” “destitution.”

**1050** *Death to gruel and salt*: cause of the exhaustion of the gruel and salt of others.

*let go*: “renounce completely,” “let it all go.” See chapter 3.

## 106. BEGGING

“Begging,” “Entreating,” “Soliciting.”

**1051** *Seeing*: if you see. *refusing*: if they refuse.

*fault*: “fault,” “shame,” “wrong,” “vice.”

**1054** *deny nothing*: “do not know refusing,” “do not know concealment.”

**1055** *Because some on earth deny nothing*: “because those who deny nothing exist on earth.”

*stand in sight begging*: beg by merely standing in view.

**1056** *Seeing those*: one need not even beg.

*woe of withholding*: Parimēlaḷakar calls this an illness, because withholding belies a lack of wholeness.

**1057** *Seeing people*: one need not even beg.

**1058** *puppets*: “wooden dolls.” Since people would no longer accrue the goodness of giving, they would be as good as dead.

**1059** *splendor*: renown, glory.

## 107. DREAD OF BEGGING

Fear of begging, of entreating, of soliciting.

**1061** *eyes*: “people like eyes,” people as precious as eyes.

*that delight in giving*: “that hide nothing and delight in giving.”

**1062** *perish*: “perish completely,” “be utterly undone.”

**1063** *hardship*: “the hardship of poverty,” “the misery of having nothing.”

**1064** *with nothing*: “with no place.” *Nothing*: “no place.”

**1065** *broth*: “a thin broth,” “a thin gruel.”

**1069** *wilt*: “melt,” “shrink.”



1070 *passes*: goes, leaves him.

## 108. WICKEDNESS

In this final chapter of part II, Tiruvalluvar deals with the opposite of “The Splendor of Kings” with which he began.

1071 *no others / Look*: “we have seen none who look.”

1073 *Do*: “conduct themselves by doing.”

1075 *code*: code of conduct, code of honor, rule of life. Fear keeps villains in line and is their way in the world. *and avarice / A little if there*: literally, “beyond that, if avarice is there, there is a little [in this code].”

1077 *wet hands*: hands wet with food, hands newly washed after eating.

1078 *respond to*: are of service in response to.

*crushed like cane*: crushed and wrung like sugarcane.

1079 *Seek out their faults*: “are expert at seeing their faults.” See faults even when they have none.

1080 *rush*: if they didn’t move quickly, people would realize their wickedness and not buy.

## PART THREE LOVE

Of the three parts of the Tirukkural, this may be the most Tamil. It draws on a long tradition of Tamil love poetry, which in turn draws on the Tamil landscape and on a series of figures and situations intertwined with that landscape. One may find a point of entry in A. K. Ramanujan’s celebrated *The Interior Landscape: Classical Tamil Love Poems*.

In Parimēlalākar’s arrangement, the twenty-five chapters of part III fall into two sections: secret love (kurals 109–115) and wedded love (kurals 116–133). Secret love could also be translated as “clandestine love” or “stolen love.” The chapters, however, can also be categorized in other ways. To the attentive reader, the verses offer their own clues.

### I. SECRET LOVE

## 109. ALLURE

The bewildered experience of the lover seeing his beloved.

**1081** *siren*: “siren,” “celestial woman,” “deity.” *jewels*: “beautiful jewels,” “beautiful earrings.”

**1082** *sirens*: see the note to kural 1081.

**1083** *death*: “that which is called death.” *fierce*: “fierce,” “warring,” “battling.”

**1084** *don’t fit*: “are warring against,” “are battling against.”

**1086** If her eyebrows were straight, they would hide her eyes and I would not suffer her gaze.

**1087** *An elephant*: “an elephant in rut,” “an elephant in rage.”

**1088** *forehead*: brow. See the note to kural 908.

**1089** *all these jewels*: “these mismatched jewels,” “these clashing jewels.”  
*this doe-eyed girl*: this girl with eyes as innocent as a deer’s.

## 110. KNOWING SIGNS

**1092** *Furtive*: “secret,” “unseen.” Seemingly unseen.  
*love*: romantic love, erotic love, lovemaking.

**1094** A verse that exemplifies Tiruvalluvar’s understanding of love’s subtleties. If the love-stricken young man isn’t looking at her, how can he see she’s smiling?

**1096** *sees*: “understands quickly,” “sees quickly.” Parimēlalakar attributes these words to the heroine’s girlfriend, who speaks them to herself.

**1097** *seem cross*: “like those of enemies.”

**1099** *Looks*: “common looks,” “general glances.”

## 111. THE JOYS OF JOINING

*Joining*: “being together,” “embracing,” “uniting.”

**1101** *this shining jewel*: she with the shining jewels.

**1103** *lotus-eyed god*: “the one with lotus eyes,” interpreted as Tirumal (Vishnu), Indra (Lord of the Gods), or saints and ascetics more generally.

- 1104** *cools*: delights. In Tamil, rooted in a land that blazes in summer, coolness evokes delight and pleasure.
- 1106** *ambrosia*: as in kurals 11, 64, and 720, the nectar of the gods that yields eternal life.
- 1107** *golden*: beautiful; shining in complexion; the color of dried mango leaves.  
*like feasting with guests / In one's home*: the stage of the householder, not yet attained.  
 Parimēlaḷakar attributes these words to the hero, answering the heroine's girlfriend who tells him, "You should marry her quickly and make a home."
- 1108** Parimēlaḷakar attributes these words to the hero, who refuses the advice to marry given by the heroine's girlfriend. Where there are not two, how can there be marriage?
- 1109** *Turning*: "turning cold," "sulking."  
*joined in love*: Parimēlaḷakar interprets this as joined in marriage.  
 As in kurals 1107 and 1108, Parimēlaḷakar attributes these words to the hero, who refuses the advice, given by the heroine's girlfriend, to get married. Marriage leads to the cycle of turning cold and turning back again. We have no need of this, for we are one in love already.
- 1110** *this jewel*: this beautifully jeweled one.

## 112. IN PRAISE OF HER

- 1111** *anicham*: see the note to kural 90.
- 1112** *anyone*: "many."
- 1113** *smile*: her teeth as revealed by her smile. *her arms—bamboo*: see the note to kural 906.
- 1114** *water lilies*: "the blue lotus," "the purple water lily," "the blue nelumbo."  
*look to the ground*: "droop and look at the ground."
- 1115** *good drums*: drums of celebration instead of drums of mourning.  
*anicham*: see kurals 90 and 1111.  
 His beloved's waist is so slender that even the weight of an anicham flower with its stem would be too much for it to bear.
- 1120** *Anicham*: see kurals 90, 1111, and 1115.  
*berries of thorns*: the thorny nutlets of *Tribulus terrestris*, sometimes called

cow's thorn or bullhead in English.

### 113. IN PRAISE OF LOVE

The first five verses speak in the voice of the hero, the second five in the voice of the heroine.

**1123** *my eye*: “the pupil of the eye.” *brow*: see kurals 908 and 1088.

**1124** Parimēlaḷakar paints a picture of the hero saying these words to himself as he leaves his love's side, having noticed the arrival of dawn.

**1127** *I do not paint them*: because to paint them I'd have to close them, even only for a moment.

**1129** *if I close my eyes*: if I sleep, awaiting his return. *place*: “place,” “town.” Implicitly, friend, girlfriend. With the hero staying away, the heroine does not sleep, which leads her girlfriend to call him heartless. But the heroine clings to his image in her eye. Compare with kurals 1219 and 1220.

**1130** The hero has gone away and people call him heartless. For the heroine, however, he remains in her heart. Compare with kurals 1219 and 1220.

### 114. DOWN WITH DECORUM

“Casting Off Shame.” In ancient Tamil Nadu, a lover made his love public, in hopes of marriage, by mounting a horse made out of palm leaves and pulling an image of his beloved behind him.

The first seven verses speak in the voice of the hero, with the remaining three in the voice of the heroine.

**1131** *those suffering love*: those who have loved in secret and suffer from separation in public.

**1132** *decorum*: shame, propriety. The lover has already lost all of his other strengths and virtues. This is the only one that remains. *soul*: “life,” “breath,” “spirit.”  
*palm*: the palm-leaf horse.

**1133** *power*: “power” “mastery,” “energy.” *proportion*: modesty, propriety, a sense of shame.

**1134** *proportion and power*: see the note to kural 1133.

1135 *palm*: the palm-leaf horse.

1138 *pity*: pity for my state.

*thought*: thought of my honor, thought of my virtue.

1139 *Love*: the heroine treats the love she has as its own being or entity.

## 115. TALK

The importance of knowledge conveyed by gossip. With the once secret lovers exposed and apart, such talk keeps their hearts connected.

The first five verses speak in the voice of the hero, with the second five in the voice of the heroine.

1141 *People talk*: people talk of our love.

*dear life continues*: my aching but precious life remains alive. Some commentators also interpret this phrase to mean that the hero's beloved remains alive. *grace*: "divinity," "fortune," "luck."

*Many don't know this*: if they did, they wouldn't talk, and dear life would cease living.

1142 *so rare*: so precious, so hard for me to reach. *place*: "town," "people," "community."

*talks / And gives her to me*: for such talk keeps anyone else from marrying her.

1143 Parimēlaḷakar sees this verse and the others from the first half of this chapter as what the hero says to the heroine's girlfriend, who has come to tell him the rumors and urge him to get married.

1144 *die*: "lose its nature."

1146 *once*: "one day."

*A snake swallowed the moon*: image for a lunar eclipse.

1147 *talk*: "the talk of this place," "the talk of this town." *illness*: lovesickness.

1149 *said not to worry*: said not to worry that he'd leave me.

1150 *do right*: "grant," "give," "bestow." Marry me, take me with him. Maṇakkuṭavar interprets this verse as saying, instead, that since this place has talked, its people will now give me to him.

## II. WEDDED LOVE

In Parimēlaḷakar's arrangement, kural 116–33 fall under the heading of

wedded love, exploring the archetypal figures and situations of Tamil love poetry pertaining to married life.

#### 116. UNBEARABLE ABSENCE

The agony experienced by a heroine when her husband has to go elsewhere to work or to fulfill some other obligation. This agony is often described by the heroine's girlfriend rather than the heroine herself, as if to show that even the thought of his departure leaves her speechless.

**1151** *if coming back quickly*: if you're saying you'll be coming back soon, as you go out the door.

*Tell those still living*: because I'll already be dead. Parimēlaḷakar interprets this kural as spoken by the heroine's girlfriend to the hero, in which case the line would mean "for she'll already be dead."

**1152** *His sight*: even just seeing him.

*His touch*: "our embracing," "our uniting."

Notice how this kural takes on different tones if one hears it as the voice of the heroine or as the voice of her girlfriend.

**1153** *His words*: his promise to remain, his words of consolation. *he knows*: he knows she can't bear his absence.

*But parting still looms*: but somehow he still plans to go. Here, too, this could be either in the voice of the heroine or in the voice of her girlfriend.

**1154** *If he says not to worry*: if he says, "Don't worry, I'm not leaving."  
*those who believed*: the heroine's girlfriend speaks of her friend and herself as if they were other people.

**1155** *reunion*: "union," "embrace."

**1157** *This captain*: "the one of the harbor," "the one of the seaside," "the chief of a maritime tract." In traditional Tamil love poetry, the seashore is associated with the agony of separation.

Here the heroine says to her girlfriend, "You needn't tell me he's going; my body already withers away." See also kural 1234.

**1158** *live without sisters*: "living where there are no sisters," "living in a place without any girlfriends." Since you didn't keep him from going, you aren't a sister of mine. Here I have no sisters.

**1159** *which burns when touched*: which burns only when touched.

**1160** *their hearts healed*: "having cured their lovesickness." *there are so many*: implicitly, there are none.

## 117. PINING AWAY

**1162** *nor tell it*: since her husband is away, she would need to send him a message and doing so would bring her shame.

**1163** *Love*: lovesickness.

*hang from the ends*: the image is of a pole balanced on one's shoulders, each side bearing its own burden.

**1167** *In love's vast waters*: "swimming in love's vast waters."

**1170** *thoughts*: "mind," "heart-and-mind."

## 118. THE LONGINGS OF EYES

**1171** *ails me*: "that caused this unending ailment."

**1172** *eyelined eyes*: eyes that had beauty but not knowledge. *saw without seeing*: saw without knowing, saw without realizing.  
*suffer without seeing*: suffer without seeing how they caused their own suffering.

**1174** *eyelined eyes*: see the note to kural 1172.

*This endless disease*: "this endless, unbearable disease."

**1175** *illness*: "lovesickness."

**1178** *Cannot rest without seeing him*: one might go so far as to say that her beloved has actually returned, but her eyes, worn out from weeping, can neither see him nor bear not seeing him.

**1179** *he comes they don't sleep*: they remain awake out of fear that he'll leave again.

**1180** *drums for eyes*: eyes that broadcast everything.

## 119. PALLOR

**1181** *how I've paled*: "how my nature has paled," "how my nature has swallowed."

**1182** *he gave love*: "he gave." He gave me love, he gave me himself, he gave me myself.

**1185** *there*: the there between here and far way.

## 120. THE ANGUISH OF SOLITUDE

1191 *Those having*: implicitly, I am not among them.

1192 *rain*: implicitly, rain in measure, as opposed to unseasonal or ruinous rain.

Without the gift of her love's presence, the heroine feels like a field without rain.

1193 *lovers who are loved*: lovers who have their love with them. *glory*: "glory," "exultation."

Since she and her husband are apart, the heroine experiences life as death.

1194 *Those loved*: those loved and respected by all.

1195 *what does the one / We love give us*: only suffering.

1196 *Like a pole*: like a pole on one's shoulders. Parimēlaḷakar encapsulates the sentiment this way: "If he felt the love I feel, would I be suffering like this?"

1197 *Standing*: standing and conducting himself. *love*: the god of love.

1198 Parimēlaḷakar sees this verse as spoken by the heroine who still hasn't seen the messenger she sent return.

1199 Parimēlaḷakar also sees this verse as spoken by the heroine who still hasn't seen the messenger she sent return.

1200 *Dear heart*: "bless you, heart."

*sea*: the sea of love, the sea of suffering.

## 121. THE LONGING OF MEMORY

1201 *The thought alone*: even just thinking of when we were together.

*sweeter than wine*: see kural 1090. Parimēlaḷakar sees these words as the words of the hero, speaking to his friend who acts as his messenger. Other commentators see the verse as the heroine speaking to her girlfriend.

1202 As with kural 1201, Parimēlaḷakar sees this verse as coming from the hero, speaking to his friend who acts as his messenger. Maṇakkuṭavar, by contrast, sees it as the heroine speaking to her girlfriend, answering her friend's fear that this desolation will ruin her.



**1203** The kural refers to the thought that people sneeze because someone is thinking of them.

**1204** Parimēlaḷakar suggests that the heroine wonders in this verse whether her love hasn't returned because he hasn't finished his work, even though he remembers her, or because he has and has forgotten her.

**1206** *our days*: "our days together."  
Both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar see this verse as the heroine's answer to her girlfriend, who says, "All this thought of him is killing you."

**1207** *thought*: the thought of being apart, the thought of forgetting him.

**1208** *he never gets angry*: because he doesn't care, because he doesn't love me.  
*how great / My lover's regard*: like a great ascetic, he shows compassion even for my faults.

**1209** *cruelty*: "lack of compassion," "lack of benevolence."

**1210** *I would see him*: Parimēlaḷakar writes that when lovers apart both see a bright moon, their eyes touch each other in that gaze.  
*Without leaving*: without leaving my heart. Maṇakkuṭavar interprets the phrase "Stay and shine" as "Go and set" or "Why won't you set?" In his interpretation, the heroine wants to sleep so she can see her love in her dreams.

## 122. TALK OF DREAMS

The heroine tells her girlfriend what kind of dreams she's been having.

**1211** *message*: "message," "messenger." *what*: "what welcome," "what feast."

**1212** *carp-like eyes*: eyes darting like carp; eyes swimming in tears.

**1213** *no love*: no heart or compassion, for he hasn't yet returned. *in life*: in waking life.

**1214** *Dreams give me love*: "love exists because of my dreams." *bring*: "find and bring," "seek and bring back."  
*no love*: no heart or compassion, for he hasn't yet returned. *in life*: in waking life.

**1215** *in life*: in waking life.

**1216** *If there wasn't this waking*: “if there wasn't this thing called waking.”

**1217** *brute*: “cruel one,” “harsh one.”  
*without love*: heartless and compassionless, for he hasn't yet returned.

**1218** *He's back in my heart*: “he has rushed back into my heart.”

**1219** *call him*: “condemn him as,” “accuse him of being.” *loveless*: heartless and compassionless, for he hasn't yet returned.  
*in life*: in waking life. Compare with kurals 1129 and 1130.

**1220** *These people*: “the people of this place,” “these neighbors.”  
Compare with kurals 1129 and 1130.

### 123. THE MISERY OF EVENING

In classical Tamil love poetry, evening is associated with the anguish of separation.

**1221** *the lance that ends wives*: “the lance that devours the lives of wives.”  
*live long*: “bless you.” Curse you.

**1222** *bless you*: see the note to kural 1221.  
*bewildering*: Parimēlaḷakar sees this in reference to evening being neither day nor night.

**1224** *Implicitly*: With my beloved the evening arrived and brought me the joys of life.

**1225** *evil*: “enmity,” “hostility.”  
*the evening*: the evening that brought the joys of union during the time that the heroine and her beloved were secretly together.  
*the dawn*: the morning that brought the pain of separation during the time that the heroine and her beloved were secretly together. Now it brings instead the memory of dreaming.

**1226** *him*: “my love,” “my husband.”

**1227** *At dawn*: see the note to kural 1225. *this disease*: this lovesickness.

**1228** *Battle-axe*: “weapon of death.”  
*evening ablaze*: “evening that burns like fire.”

**1229** *sorrow / Will baffle this place*: because I'll be dead. *this place*: this

village, this town.

**1230** *who thinks only / Of wealth:* whose nature has turned only toward wealth.

#### 124. THE DROOPING OF LIMBS

**1231** *shy even from flowers:* compare with kural 1114. Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend, who takes her friend's plight so much to heart that she speaks of them both as being left in sadness.

**1232** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend, implying that the heroine must get ahold of herself.

**1233** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend, implying once again that the heroine must get ahold of herself.

**1234** *are losing their bangles:* "slacken and lose their bangles," "lose their greatness and bangles."

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend, implying yet again that the heroine must get ahold of herself.

**1235** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend, implying a final time that the heroine must get ahold of herself.

**1236** One can imagine this as the heroine's reply to her girlfriend's words in kural 1235.

**1237** *the uproar of my arms:* "the uproar caused by my arms."

The heroine's heart wants to go to the hero. See also chapter 125.

**1238** *brow:* see kurals 908, 1088, and 1123.

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to himself. If that could happen when I held her in my arms, what might this absence do to her?

**1239** *One puff of air:* see also kural 1108.

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to himself. If that could happen as we embraced, what might this absence do to her?

**1240** *forehead:* see kurals 908, 1088, 1123, and 1238. Said by the hero to himself.

## 125. TO HER HEART

1243 *woe*: “disease,” “distress,” “affliction.”

1244 *take / My eyes with you*: when you go to see him.

1245 *hate him*: “call him an enemy,” “call him despised.” *leave him*: “release from our hand.”

1246 *who soothes*: “who embraces and soothes.”

1248 *loveless in ignorance*: loveless not knowing how we suffer.

## 126. LOSS OF RESTRAINT

Steadiness, self-control, adherence to principle.

1251 *aching*: “love,” “passion,” “eros,” “desire.”

1252 *Love*: “aching,” “passion,” “eros,” “desire.”

1254 *Escapes into the open*: “escapes and stands in public.”

1255 *dignity*: greatness, restraint.

1257 *he*: “the loved one,” “the lover,” “the beloved.”

1258 *forces*: “forces,” “powers,” “armies,” “weapons.” *modesty*: “womanhood,” “womanliness.”  
*The sweet nothings*: “the many gentle lies.”

## 127. LONGING TO REUNITE

Parimēlaḷakar sets the first seven kural in the voice of the heroine and the last three in the voice of the hero.

1261 *grow weak and lose luster*: from watching and watching for his return.

1262 *Glittering friend*: “you adorned in bright jewels.” Implicitly, you with no idea, you who have done nothing to help me. Commentators see this verse as the heroine’s answer to her girlfriend, who tells her to forget about her love.  
*if I forget him*: “if I forget him now,” “if I forget him today.” *forever*: now and in lives to come.

**1263** *With his heart*: with his heart as his companion and not me. “Heart” can also mean “mind” or “intention.”

*I’m still here*: I still exist.

**1264** *He*: “the one who left.”

*with love*: with the same love we knew together.

**1265** *him*: “beloved,” “husband.”

**1266** *illness*: “lovesickness that causes one to pale.” **1268** *I shall dine*: I shall return home and feast.

**1270** *hold*: embrace, unite with.

*one’s heart*: for Parimēlaḷakar, “her heart”; for Maṇakkuṭavar, “my heart.”

## 128. MAKING SIGNS KNOWN

**1271** *dark eyes*: eyelined eyes.

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said to the heroine by the hero, who has returned.

**1272** *bamboo-armed*: see kurals 906 and 1113. Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to the heroine’s girlfriend.

**1273** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to the heroine’s girlfriend.

**1274** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to the heroine’s girlfriend.

**1275** *her bangles*: “her closely placed bangles.” Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the hero to the heroine’s girlfriend.

**1276** *passion and fire*: “greatness” and “rareness.”

*Tell me they’ll disappear*: “tell me of lovelessness.” Tell me he’s leaving again.

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine to her girlfriend.

**1277** *coolness*: the coolness of separation.

*lover from cool shores*: see the note to kural 1157.

*my bangles / Know it before I do*: they already slip from my arms. See also kural 1234.

Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine to her girlfriend.

**1278** Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine to her girlfriend.

**1279** *her bangles her arms*: because her bangles are already slipping from her arms gone lean.  
*her feet*: because they want to go with you. *That's what she did*: that's what she did upon realizing you were going; that's what she did upon my telling her you were going. Parimēlaḷakar interprets this verse as said by the heroine's girlfriend to the hero.

**1280** *tell*: “tell and implore.” Ask without asking for what heals their lovesickness: the presence of their beloved.

## 129. LONGING FOR UNION

Parimēlaḷakar interprets the first seven verses as the heroine's answers to her girlfriend who says, “If you think he'll be leaving again, why aren't you angry?”

**1281** *Rejoicing*: gleefulness, inebriation.  
*not wine*: see kurals 1090, 1145, and 1201.

**1282** *tree*: “palmyra tree.” *seed*: “millet seed.”  
The same pairing appears in kurals 104 and 433.

**1283** *without care*: without care for me, without caring for me.

**1284** *went/To his side*: went to join him, went to embrace him.

**1285** *him*: “husband.”

**1287** *knowing the current*: “knowing the water will take him.”

**1288** *Despite your disgrace*: “though you do things that bring disgrace.”  
Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the heroine's girlfriend speaking to the hero.  
Maṇakkuṭavar sees it as the heroine addressing him directly.

**1289** *moment*: “moment,” “season,” “occasion,” “apex.” Parimēlaḷakar places this kural in the voice of the hero. Maṇakkuṭavar places it in the voice of the heroine.

**1290** Both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar place this kural in the voice of the hero.

## 130. AT ODDS WITH ONE'S HEART

**1296** *thinking*: thinking of him, thinking of how he wronged me.

**1299** Parimēlaḷakar sees this kural as the voice of the hero.

Maṇakkuṭavar sees it as the voice of the heroine.

**1300** *kind*: kin.

Parimēlaḷakar sees this kural as the voice of the hero. Maṇakkuṭavar sees it as the voice of the heroine.

### 131. SULKING

The first of the three chapters on sulking that bring the Tirukkural to a close.

**1301** Both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar see this as the voice of the heroine's girlfriend, giving the heroine her advice.

**1302** *Sulking is like salt*: a little sulking, like salt, brings out the sweetness of love.

Both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar see this as the voice of the heroine, in answer to her girlfriend's advice.

**1303** Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the heroine speaking directly to the hero.

**1304** *turning/To*: "reconciling with," "being conscious of," "experiencing," "realizing." See also kural 1109.

*turned away*: turned away in feigned anger, turned away out of hurt.

As with kural 1303, Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the heroine speaking directly to the hero.

**1305** Sulking is beauty for the good because sulking leads to reunion.

Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the hero speaking to himself, having reunited with his love, who had been sulking.

**1306** *quarrels*: the quarrels of old grievances. *sulking*: the sulking of new grievances.

*rotten or unripened*: Parimēlaḷakar associates the rotten fruit with quarreling and the unripened fruit with sulking. Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the voice of the hero. Maṇakkuṭavar sees it as the voice of the heroine.

**1307** Both Parimēlaḷakar and Maṇakkuṭavar see this as the voice of the hero.

**1308** *sees that one suffers*: sees that one suffers because of him or her.

Parimēlaḷakar sees this as the voice of the hero. Maṇakkuṭavar sees it as the voice of the heroine.

**1309** *Sulking in love is sweet*: "sulking with one who loves is sweet."

Implicitly, sulking with one without love is bitter.

*water / In shade is sweet:* cool water in shade quenches one's thirst, unlike water beneath the hot sky.

**1310** Here I've followed Parimēlaḷakar, who sees this verse as the voice of the hero. By contrast, Maṇakkuṭavar sees this as the voice of the heroine. His reading could be translated like this:

*One able to let me keep wasting away—my heart Yearns only to join him*

## 132. SULKING'S SUBTLETIES

**1311** *women:* "all women," "all those with the nature of women."

**1313** *a garland of new flowers:* "a garland of tree flowers." Parimēlaḷakar notes that since sulking, in Tamil poetry, is associated with the fields, this garland of tree flowers, coming from somewhere else, heightens his wife's sense that he wears them for someone else. As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even to adorn myself is wrong.

**1314** *our love is greater than any:* we love more fully than anyone has ever loved.

*Which any which any:* which other woman have you been with that our love exceeds?

**1315** *Overflowed with tears:* thinking we'll part in the next.

**1316** *I remembered you:* I thought only of you when I was gone, I remembered you always when I was gone.

*forgot:* The implication is that if he hadn't forgotten her, he couldn't have remembered her, because to remember one must first forget. See also kural 1125. As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even to have thought of her is wrong.

**1317** *sneeze:* the belief is that people sneeze because someone else thinks of them. See also kural 1203.

As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even to sneeze is wrong.

**1318** *Whose thought do you hide:* "do you hide the thought of one of your lovers?" See also kurals 1203 and 1217.

As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even not to sneeze is wrong.

**1319** *calm her:* calm her after sulking, reassure her after sulking. As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even to reassure her is wrong.

**1320** *think:* think upon all of her qualities.

*Who do you think of:* whom do you compare me to. As Maṇakkuṭavar puts it, even to look at her is wrong.



### 133. SULKING AND BLISS

1321 *Brings*: “is a powerful way to make.” *closer*: more loving, more caring.

1322 *sag*: “sag,” “droop,” “wilt.”

1323 *joined like earth and water*: compare with kural 452. *heaven*: celestial realm; realm of gods; heavens.

For those versed in classical Tamil literature, this kural, like kural 64, evokes a poem from one of the ancient anthologies, in this case Kuṟuntokai. The author of the poem is known simply as Cempulappeyaṇīrār, “Honored of Rainfall and Red Earth,” which refers to a line from the poem itself:

*Who is your mother to mine  
How is my father related to yours  
How did we know one another  
Like rainfall and red earth  
Our hearts themselves came together*

1324 *open*: “break open,” “break down.”

1325 *something*: joy, sweetness, pleasure.

1326 *having eaten*: “digestion of what was eaten.” The sense is that the hunger once a meal has been digested makes the next meal all the more sweet.

*loving*: “joining,” “coming together,” “uniting.”

1328 *forehead*: see kurals 908, 1088, 1123, 1238, and 1240.

1329 *long*: long enough to yield sulking’s sweet fruit.

1330 *joy of joys*: “even a greater joy than that.” In Parimēlaḷakar’s ordering, the last word of this verse ends with the last sound of the Tamil alphabet, just as the first word of the first verse of the first chapter begins with the first sound of the alphabet. Here I’ve tried to give my own small nod to that.

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